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THE WREATHED DAGGER

"She drew back in a piteous silence" (*see page* 231).

THE WREATHED DAGGER

BY

MARGARET YOUNG

WITH FRONTISPIECE BY

FRED LEIST

CASSELL AND COMPANY, LIMITED
LONDON NEW YORK, TORONTO & MELBOURNE
MCMIX

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To

Gwendolen Sutherland Morris

THE WREATHED DAGGER

CHAPTER I

COLD, still, and blue lay the sheet of water along the forest-clearing. Cold, still, and blue stretched above the water the pale November sky. The forest, growing low down and close to the verge, or clothing the hillside that backed the open, was motionless and soundless:—like a mist.

The woodman's broad, comfortable, oak-timbered cottage stood back under the lee of the hill. A good two hundred yards of firm, level greensward spread from its door to the water's edge. The sward was so firm and so thick that only a faint tint of brown marked the track the horses were used to take from the shed to the watering-place.

The woodman's thirteen-year-old son John, perched on the bare back of Brown Billy, was urging him with voice and heel in the direction of the pond. But Brown Billy's resistance was firm, in fear of the coldness of the water, and John's urging (from knowledge of Brown Billy's tricks) was but half-hearted. Observing

which, from the window where he sat, beside his morning bread and cheese and ale, Thomas Stubbs the woodman set himself in train to move, meaning to get upon his feet, and to wipe his mouth, and to come round into the porch, and to let the shirking pair know what he thought of 'em.

But they never knew it.

For as Thomas Stubbs stood up, the clear silence of the woods broke in a thundering sound.

The forest had heard that sound one hundred and fifty years ago, and Thomas Stubbs and his son had heard it never. But they knew it, man and boy, if the forest did not: and Thomas ran to the door, his mouth unwiped: and John jerked Brown Billy's head sharp round, and lashed him along with the halter's end; and Brown Billy jogged heavily back towards the cottage door, well content with the turn things had taken.

And down the forest-path they came, at a pounding trot, three-score armed men, riding from battle. And while the boy grinned with pleasure, the father standing by in his full strength, felt the sharp stab of shame, that he did so stand by, and had missed his chance to strike for King Charles along with these: not knowing the mournful chances six devastating years would yet bring.

As the troop rode out on to the clearing, the light shone full on their leader's face. He was a big, stalwart, well-built man of some forty or fifty years, with the careless carriage that is born with native powers and fostered in lofty station. His face, from the broad brow, with its bright, full, quick-glancing eye, to the resolute mouth and chin, was high-coloured—almost florid. But neither heavy night-draught nor morning stirrup-cup had any hand in that sanguine glow. This was a man that knew himself and his world too well to let such an enemy steal away his brains. Achievement in the past, unbounded confidence for the future—these only had lit the inward fire that cold air and hard riding had fanned to a flush.

He half-checked his horse upon the open, noting the place—the sheet of water, and the cottage.

"Who is it?" asked young John in his father's ear.

"Hush," said his father. Then he whispered back, "'Tis Sir Roger himself."

"Sir Roger Arden!"

The boy cried it out, as under a blow. Unbidden tears rushed and filled his eyes, and through them he stared out at that triumphant figure.

Sir Roger Arden had found time to doff his

fighting-gear. His thick, ruddy, curled hair hung down upon a deep lace collar; rich lawn and lace showed in the slashings of his sleeves, and again where his bright brown doublet opened; his hat had a great white plume. You would have guessed him riding to a feast, rather than from a fight.

He rose in his stirrups, turned, and waved the plumed hat to point out the cottage.

"Scaife-Wood Pond, lads," he called; "and a bare twelve-mile now from home!"

There was a shout. But the whole jingling troop went by after him unseen by John, for the mist of tears that swam before his eyes. Till he heard his father's slow voice:

"Ay, ay. Yo've seen Sir Roger Arden, sure-ly. An' the last yo' are, if I guess right, will ever see him with that look on's face."

"They shud ha' told him," cried the boy furiously. He was furious that his eyes were dropping tears, and that his voice came in a hoarse, watery choke. "Lettin' a man go ride in among 'em that-like guise," he said. "Like a bridegroom!"

"They sought to tell him," said Thomas Stubbs. "They sent out men enough wi' the news, an'ways enough. Dear knows how he's come through by this way, wi' all the Parliament-men lyin' t' west."

Then he gave a grim chuckle.

"Ride yo' arter him, Johnny," he said, "an' tell him!—I'll lend yo' the loan o' Brown Billy, there. Ride arter Sir Roger! Tell him the news from Thirlby yo'rself! It's easy done!" But for all the man's rough words his own eyes were wet.

Meanwhile Sir Roger and his men rode down the long wood-path, turned from it, left the woods behind them, and came out on to the hard, high road, and into a sudden, jolly, upspringing gust of wind.

Glad enough were the men who swung along behind Sir Roger to catch up the gay note and brisk pace he set. For the Ardens of Thirlby were good masters when pleased, and bitter ones when crossed.

John Jenkins, the chief groom, grumbled, it is true. He said that the master urged the pace too hard for the weight the horses carried and the miles they had to make.

"John Jenkins is a fool," laughed Robert Gamage, the horse-boy. "He gives more thought to the beasts that we keep than to the master that keeps us."

"A fool and an old bachelor, too," said William Oake, who would himself have been a married man by now; but the sudden calling out of Sir Roger's troop to join the King's Standard at Nottingham had parted William

from Rose Dovey after the banns had been twice called.

"Bachelor yourself, William Oake!" cut in an older man. "What's saying good-bye to a sweetheart or so to compare with parting from your wife? Above all, when she's nearing her trouble, good woman."

"And when the wife is such a woman as Madam Arden!"

The old grey-bearded steward of Thirlby took up the word. Nothing could have held back Christopher Stocker from venturing his old bones for the King. He could fight, and he would fight, and he now had fought, as well as the youngest spark among 'em. And he was coming home no whit the worse. Only the touch of autumn in the air this morning began to remind him that his bones were old.

"Such a woman!" He said it with reverence, and there was a grumble of assent from the men. "When the wife is Madam Arden, and the child that's coming is heir to Thirlby, 'tis small wonder that Sir Roger hurries home."

"Ay, ay, Christopher Stocker. We all know that. It's Madam Arden and the heir that's bringing us along this pace."

"Hard on the horses," muttered John Jenkins into his beard, failing to find a listener more sympathetic.

"Is there *another* heir coming to Thirlby?"

The question came from over Christopher Stocker's shoulder.

The old man started; he had clean forgotten little Joan Arden, Sir Roger's niece. Yet the child was no further off from him than perched on a pillion at his back.

The little maid and her brother Dick had joined the troop last night, and Joan had been given into the old steward's care. Which had been very kindly care, for he was a good old man, and had eleven grandchildren of his own. And, besides that he pitied little Joan's misfortune in having had her father slain at Edgehill, he grieved more for her rarer and more cruel calamity: Joan Arden had been born blind.

Therefore, since he could not lighten her darkness with all the glad, passing sights of the road, he had tried his best to cheer her with talk of that which lay ahead. But the child had never once broken silence, nor so much as given a sign that she heard him, with his pleasant chat of Thirlby, and kind Madam Arden, and little Mistress Millicent: till at last he had guessed her sleepy or sullen, and had let her be; and presently forgot her.

Now he answered with belated caution:

"It may be that an heir will come to Thirlby, little mistress. Only Heaven knows."

"An heir *is* coming; my brother Dick is coming," said Joan. "He is the heir; he is riding there behind us. My brother is the heir of Thirlby."

"It may prove so," said Christopher Stocker, always cautiously.

"It *is* so. Father said it is so."

"You'd best sleep again, little mistress."

"I was not asleep," said Joan; "I was listening."

Christopher Stocker coughed uncomfortably. There was something to him not canny in this elfish, unchildish child perched so silent and so watchful behind his back.

Right in the rear of the troop, and out of hearing of this talk, there rode a couple of lads. But I had better have said two odd lads, for no two were ever less of a pair.

One was Dick Arden, little Joan's brother, and nephew to Sir Roger Arden; a kindly, happy lad, taught by his father, as Joan had said, to bear himself as became the heir-presumptive of Thirlby.

The other was Ned Falconer, of widely different build and parentage—no kin at all to Sir Roger, but sister's son to Madam Arden.

He was an orphan, as was honest Dick: both were wards of Sir Roger's: both, as well as little Joan, had joined the troop last night;

and neither had yet been honoured by any speech with Sir Roger Arden. They were strangers to each other, and rode along side by side in silence, Dick thinking very happily of nothing at all, and Ned thinking of—everything.

And for each of them, as for the men, it was good to be alive on that good morning, with the wind so fresh, the pace so free, and the captain in such high feather.

Sir Roger had three excellent good reasons for his good spirits.

First: Here he rode at the head of his own men, reared on his own lands, mounted on his own beasts, trained and led and offered by himself to the service of King Charles, for whom they had stood so stubbornly in their corner of Edgehill fight that it was thanks only to them that the rebels could not claim Edgehill for an out-and-out victory.

Next: His Majesty, in reward of this excellent service, had granted Sir Roger leave to go visit and comfort his wife.

And last: the King, having added to his leave this qualifying clause, "if he could get to her," Sir Roger was getting to her, straight, by the shortest road, and had cut his men's way clean through the lines of the Parliament's men, who lay between the King's men and London.

So he who had ridden forth in doubt and sadness, not knowing when he should look again on wife or home, was speeding to that home, on the wings of a victory caught by his own hand, to stand by that wife in her hour of need, and to receive into his arms that first-born son, that young Roger Arden, who should add yet more laurels to his name.

For of one thing he had never doubted: the child would be a son. An heir male in the direct line to be denied to Arden of Thirlby? The thing had not been—and could not be.

Look where Sir Roger might then, backward or forward, all smiled on him. And as he sunned himself in these thoughts, his satisfaction flowed over into benevolence.

He remembered his brother Richard's boy, whom he had sent for yesterday. Richard Arden had been shot at Edgehill, and his poor little younger brother's property lay very open and exposed to the rebel advance. So Sir Roger had thought it well to bring along Richard's two children, Dick and Joan, to the stronghold of Thirlby, and to the mothering of Alice, his wife.

He felt this morning a cheerful, careless compassion for Richard's boy. Why, Dick, poor lad, might have lived to be Arden of Thirlby but for the coming of Roger, the heir

direct. He would be kind to Dick—now that he remembered him.

He turned in his saddle.

"Where's my nephew?" he called to the man next behind him, without drawing rein.

The word was passed down the troop from one man to another: a lane opened up through the ranks: and there emerged from it, and pounded heavily to the front, the two big, rough-paced troop horses that carried Dick Arden and Ned Falconer.

Both boys were out of breath from the hard bone-shaking trot that brought them up to right and left of Sir Roger. And Ned Falconer, on the left, was scarlet besides to the roots of his hair, with excitement at the honour of the summons.

"Which is Nephew Dick?" asked Sir Roger. "It's Dick I sent for. *Ah!*" with disgust.

For Ned Falconer, eager to efface himself, had tugged at his rein so hard and so suddenly, that the mare stood still and Ned went on, and found himself on her neck.

"It's easy seen *your* name's not Arden," said Sir Roger carelessly.

Ned Falconer had recovered his seat and was turning to go to the rear.

"Stay where you are," cried Sir Roger

peremptorily. "The high road's free to anyone that has the spirit to take it."

Ned Falconer paled and flushed again under Sir Roger's disdainful eye, then rode on in the place that was tossed to him, but silent, with a hanging head.

Sir Roger turned to the solid, square, cheerful-looking lad who was jogging along on his right.

"So you're Dick Arden?"

"Yes, Uncle Roger," said Dick, composedly.

"My nephew?" surveying him.

"Yes, uncle."

"You ride like my nephew, I'll say that for you," Sir Roger conceded with a nod.

"My father said that he had taught me to ride like you," answered Dick.

"H'm! Why that?" grunted his uncle, with quick suspicion.

"My father said that I must not ride like a younger son's son, for I might live to be Arden of Thirlby."

"Arden of Thirlby! You hope that?"

Sir Roger's face darkened with angry contempt, but Dick answered, unperturbed:

"No. *I* hope you will have a son, uncle, for if you do not have a son, my father said that I must be your son and marry my cousin Millicent."

"What?" shouted Sir Roger.

"And I don't want to marry," Dick ended placidly. "I want to fight."

"Fighting's all you'll ever have wits for," Sir Roger shouted, with an angry laugh, "if your wits are no better than your father's."

"*Uncle Roger!*"

The fierce, indignant cry was not from Dick. It came from Sir Roger's left.

He turned and glared. Was this the timid youngster whom he had dismissed from his attention with contempt?

Ned Falconer's hanging head was thrown high; his face was tense and quivering, and the dreamy grey eyes flashed stern and almost black, so dilated were the pupils.

"What now?" growled Sir Roger.

"It's Dick's *father!* His father's *dead,*" panted the boy. "You ought not—you must not."

"*I must not?*" Sir Roger was almost speechless before this puny onslaught.

"Never mind Uncle Roger, Ned," sang out Dick, from the right. "*I* don't. Who wants his father to have wits? *I* don't. My father died for the King, and Uncle Roger hasn't done that yet."

Sir Roger laughed out. Dick pleased him; Dick was an Arden. And if discipline needed an example, why, there was Ned ready to his hand.

He turned to him.

"*Your* father did not die for the King, Nephew Ned." Sir Roger spoke slowly and grimly.

"He could not; he died too long ago—before the war." Ned's voice tried to be steady.

"It is pity for you he did not. Can you tell me why?"

"No, uncle."

"If your father had died for the King his memory might have saved you something. Can you tell me what?—you, who can tell your betters so much."

"No, Uncle Roger."

The boy's throat was dry with fear, but his eye did not falter.

"If your father had died for the King it might have saved you a sound cuffing with a steel glove, which is the medicine I use on march to purge a saucy spirit."

"Yes, uncle."

Ned urged his horse nearer to the heavy hand.

What was it turned the man's eyes, before he struck, to the uplifted eyes that met them?—met them with a look at which his heart stood still. For whose eyes were those deep grey eyes, and where had he seen that look—which quivered to a final steadiness, against pain, in spite of fear?

They were Alice's eyes, his wife's eyes! And even now Alice might be facing pain, and fear, and—death!

The soldier's hardy senses reeled, ebbed, and left him. The morning sunshine, the noises, the movements of the highway left him. All the common, safe, surrounding, upholding things were gone from him. He was alone, one moment, with fear.

It passed; the grip on his heart relaxed. He breathed freely and was his own man again.

But with an altered purpose. The savage blow he had threatened did not fall.

Instead of it Ned took, all astonished, a kindly clap on the shoulder.

"'Tis my lady must teach you your manners," laughed Sir Roger, "since you come of her side of the house."

He laughed again, the big laugh of the healthy man, who throws off his bad dream, and then struck spurs into his horse and took his men on at a canter.

And young Ned Falconer, jolting in his generous captain's wake, was vowing him a lifelong loyalty.

CHAPTER II

THE one thing that Ned Falconer had always hungered after was a captain to whom he might swear loyalty. All his life he had been seeking for him, hoping for him sometimes, but never had found him till to-day.

The first life he could remember—his baby life—was motherless; and Mrs. Sally Block, his foster-mother, the humblest, most loving of servants, was a servant and no more. To serve at once and to command, the achievement of a real mother, was a task to which good Mrs. Sally never so much as gave a thought.

And Ned's father, Mr. Edward Falconer, was a scholar, buried deep in his books; and if he was also the head of an ancient family, that was more his misfortune than his fault. He did his duty so far as he saw it. Duty to his family bade him marry. He married, therefore, and chose a lady of good character and standing, a Tuddenham of Norwich, sister to Sir Roger Arden's wife. She was a quiet, low-voiced woman, and had disturbed him as little as a wife might, when her sudden and early death threw her infant son upon a bewildered father's hands.

Again Mr. Falconer did his best.

He looked at little Ned, gently, patiently, and absent-mindedly, twice every day, till the boy was four.

When the boy was four, Mr. Falconer summoned Dr. Bertram, the parson, and desired he should teach Ned to read. And on the day that Dr. Bertram reported that Ned could read with surprising quickness, Mr. Falconer laid his hand on the child's head, in a very kind manner, and said:

"You may now come daily, my son, to be with me in the smaller library."

That was the moment at which Ned hoped that his father would be his captain.

And Mr. Falconer meant to do his best in this instance also. But how and where should he begin? His own life had begun, as it was to end, with reading, and he knew of no other life for his boy.

So it came about that each morning brought the same course of events. Each morning a solemn-faced little boy tapped hopefully at the library door, telling himself that to-day, this very day, he might be found big enough, and good enough, to talk with his father.

Each morning "Come in" was called in the same gentle, courteous voice.

And Ned came in, and his father smiled faintly, and lifted his pen, and pointed to a

shelf. And Ned dragged the same chair—the chair that was not too heavy—in front of the shelf, and lifted down a book—the same book or another—and thought, "Perhaps he will talk to me when I have read this one," and so fell to reading. From which moment the circumstances of his own small lot ceased to be: he was lost in the conflicts and courtesies of De Joinville or Froissart: his head was whirling and his heart was throbbing with great deeds and knightly words; and the one person in that crowded library who had no existence for him was himself, Ned Falconer, forgotten in the corner.

This world of imagination was the boy's danger. Yet it seemed his sole resource. Mr. Falconer died one evening when his little son was seven years old: died as quietly as he had lived, sitting in his arm-chair among his books. And the next day, when all was in a scared hush and bustle, with messengers riding off to carry the news to this person and that, Mrs. Sally Block hunted the whole house for her orphaned nursling, till she found him at last, to her great consternation, in that library whose threshold she dared not cross.

"Master Ned! Master Ned!" she screamed from the doorway to the little figure bent over his book in his usual place.

"Hush!" said Ned, with surprised propriety, and frowned and looked to his father's empty chair—that chair into whose neighbourhood no disturbance had ever come.

"He's not *there!*" gasped Sally in terror. "Master Ned, you don't mean he is *there!*"

Ned sighed and shut his book. He climbed upon the usual chair and put the book upon its shelf, climbed down in silence, walked to the door and out of the door, and, drawing it shut behind him, said quietly:—

"Not now. I was keeping him there."

Ned did not go back to the library from which Sally Block had chased his dream. When the lawyers came five days later, Mr. Falconer's son and heir was nowhere in the house. He was down in the wood by the great piece of water, playing at Enchanted Isles and monsters out of the Shakespeare book. He took the lawyers for monsters when first they came upon him, but he was careful not to let them know it, being as fine a gentleman as his father. Besides which, he knew that there were no monsters really. Or so he was told. It was hard to know with certainty what was real when there was nobody to tell him but Sally Block. Sally Block said that the one real thing was pickled plums to your supper, and this was less than Ned could bring himself to believe—in the face of the Shakespeare book.

Nine years lay between the dreamy child of those days and the tall, half-developed lad who, on the 10th of November, 1642, was cantering towards Thirlby behind Sir Roger Arden. Ned had been under tutors and governors, and had studied history and philosophy, and Latin and Greek, and logic. But he had still to find his captain and his clue to life. When suddenly his vibrating spirit had thrilled to the wind of war which swept the land into two opposing camps when the King's Standard was unfurled.

He sent off a passionate letter to Madam Arden, his unknown kinswoman, entreating enrolment under that splendid soldier, her husband. The longed-for consent had come; he had joined the troop last night, and that morning, as he rode side by side with Dick Arden—his thoughts flashing now forward to salute his unknown leader, then back to bow down to young Dick, glorified by his father's death for the King—dream and reality had blended for Ned Falconer into one dazzling, dizzying whole.

Through which broke the summons to the front, the blunders, the contempt, the threatened blow, and then the unlooked-for shining out of Sir Roger's friendliness, in whose warmth Ned Falconer's heart leaped up and told him that he had found his captain.

As chorus to that glad thought a hum of talk rose from the rear.

"D'you hear 'em?" said Dick. "They're saying we're on Thirlby lands now."

"And Thirlby House?" asked Ned, rising in his stirrups to look about him.

"We shan't see the house for another five mile," Dick answered, "not till we cross the wooden bridge below the forge, and turn the shoulder of the hill of the Four Great Elms."

"You know Thirlby?" said Ned.

"I've not seen it," said Dick. "I'm an Arden."

"And maybe Arden of Thirlby," Ned said to himself, and looked at Dick, and thought what thoughts must be crowding on his mind riding through Thirlby lands to Thirlby House.

Dick, as a matter of fact, was thinking it was dinner-time. He was not greedy, but he was hungry.

The men's talk faltered, dropped, and fell to a hush. They were riding under the green hedge of the farm that had been Tom Hilton's. Hilton's wife would likely see them; she need not hear them, too. She had been down at the stile with the children to wave Tom "good-bye" when they rode out. Would she run down to welcome him back?

Thank God, no. Even John Jenkins was glad to hurry his horse past that stile.

When they came to the lane that led up to Hilton's cottage, Christopher Stocker slackened his pace. Then he remembered little Joan at his back, and spoke with hesitation.

"There's a woman up there, little mistress. Her husband fell beside Mr. Richard Arden. I was bidden turn off to tell her, but——"

He waited for an answer. None came. With a grunt of discomfort both at his errand and at his company, old Stocker turned his horse and rode slowly up the lane, while the men whom his halt had delayed dashed on to catch up with the rest.

No easy task, for the pace was quickening every moment. The river was in sight, and now the bridge, and the forge, and all the people of that little hamlet running to their doors, for the noise of the oncoming troop carried far at that spot where the valley narrowed. But they might as well have stayed within, good people, for Sir Roger brought his men along at a gallop now. And not a man dared draw rein—not William Oake, though the splash of white and pink before the forge was his own Rose Dovey, he knew. The villagers, mostly women and children and old men, shrank back into their doorways, lifting wondering hands and shaking sad heads, as Sir Roger took the hill at that mad pace. Sir Roger saw none of it. He was looking ahead

—straight ahead. Yonder was the shoulder of Four Elms Hill. That reached, Thirlby House would be in sight. He reached it, he turned it, and Thirlby lay below him. Thirlby—great centre of unspotted histories!—his father's house, his son's house!

Down the hill he clattered at a break-neck speed (and thought how his young Roger must sit a horse)—down the hill, through the great gates, up the avenue to the drawbridge—his men dropping out, dropping back now—huddling from him at what they saw in the faces which he did not see. He saw nothing; he was looking ahead—straight ahead. He was over the drawbridge, he was across the court; he drew rein at last when he must—in front of the great closed door . . .

Which opened. From which came out his little daughter Millicent, clad all in black, and came down the broad steps to him, where he sat on his great horse—staring, staring—and tried to speak to him, and could not, and remembered that she must speak; and spoke, and told him:

"Mother is dead. Roger is dead."

And he knew that he had known it always.

The men came crowding up next minute at their leader's angry call.

He was off his horse, on the topmost step,

the centre of a whirl of business—ordering, questioning, disposing: clutching, though he did not know it, at some rudder-lines for his derelict life: crushing, though he did not know it, his child's small hand in his; and solaced for one instant, and knowing that least of all, by the loyal light in a boy's grey eyes.

CHAPTER III

It was late afternoon of the fourteenth day of October of the year 1648.

A grey, drizzling mist had swept down from the hills and settled thick upon Thirlby House. The towers and well-manned defences of that loyal stronghold, and the encompassing lines of its Roundhead foe were blotted for the time from each other's sight. But in the lull from open conflict which of necessity ensued, both besiegers and besieged kept the look out against surprise with a sharpened care. Now and again a quick challenge, the crack of a musket, cut through the muffling air, followed by a roar of laughter at a false alarm. Cavaliers laughed lightly in that year of disaster, as men laugh who toss their lives to adorn a lost cause. For six years had passed since the bright November morning that had brought Sir Roger Arden back to his desolate home, and the fortunes of the war, long varying, had set at last, slowly, steadily, and persistently, against the King, and in favour of the Parliament.

For seventeen weeks Sir Roger Arden had held Thirlby for King Charles against a great

environing force of seasoned rebels, commanded by General Cromwell's tough and trusted right-hand man, Colonel Hales. The Lord-General, called away himself to the North, to chastise the turncoat Scots, had deputed the best officer and the largest force he could afford, to reduce that nest of hornets, Thirlby House. But Hales, to his deep chagrin, had in seventeen weeks made but little way against a crew of hot-blooded boys, who neither knew nor cared when they were beaten, handled, as they were, by the astute and stern and silent generalship which long war had taught Sir Roger Arden.

"Seventeen weeks! We'll hold it for seventy," boasted old Francis Petre cheerily. Colonel Petre was Sir Roger's senior, but in nature one with the youngest, maddest, and least responsible of the boys. He sat alone with Sir Roger before the crackling hearth. It was seldom that the two old comrades sat in quiet consultation. They had an uproarious garrison to hold in hand for one thing; and for another, it was not like Sir Roger to take counsel with any but himself.

But to-day, had Colonel Petre but perceived it, Sir Roger Arden was not like himself. Something was at work in him, for good or evil, which craved, if not a counsellor, a listener at least. Something he would have looked at,

had he dared, through another man's eyes. But the lurking thing would not forth, and though again and again, in some word, Sir Roger would show, or mean to show, some corner of his thought, again and again old Petre took the word at its most plain honest meaning, and never guessed how near he was sitting to the thing he most abhorred.

"Seventy weeks!" Sir Roger echoed his old friend's boast with a joyless laugh. Then he looked round at Petre watchfully, under bent brows. "And if we held Thirlby for seventy weeks, Francis Petre, for what king should we be holding it when the seventy weeks were gone?"

"For what king?" Colonel Petre was frankly puzzled. "Why, for what king should it be but for King Charles?" he asked.

"For the second of that name?" pursued Sir Roger sullenly. "For the boy at the Hague? Who will come to us stitched to some woman's apron-string?"

"Roger, man!" cried Colonel Petre, horror-struck. "Is there danger to his most sacred Majesty? What is it that you fear for him that you speak of the Prince of Wales as King? Is there ill news?"

"The King is at Carisbrooke," said Sir Roger.

"At Carisbrooke. Yes." Colonel Petre waited.

But Sir Roger, staring into the fire, said no more.

"Surely, yes. The King is at Carisbrooke," repeated his friend. "But in safety. He went there of his own free choice."

"He'll not leave it of his own choice," said Sir Roger.

"What do you mean? He trusted himself to Colonel Hammond's honour. Will Hammond play him false?"

"Who will not?" asked Sir Roger gloomily.

"Who?" Colonel Petre could laugh out now heartily. "Why, thou and I, Roger! There's one question I can answer, though I've no politician's head on my shoulders like thine."

Sir Roger moved in his chair.

"Thou and I!" he repeated bitterly. "A fine standing army for a king! Thou and I! When the whole kingdom, saving for some scattered strongholds, lies at Cromwell's feet! When the King's own person is in the hands of Cromwell's friend! Thou and I! I tell thee, Petre, in a month less or more, there is but one man left in England—Cromwell!"

"Cromwell!" cried Petre fiercely.

"Cromwell," pursued Sir Roger, with a heavy sullenness. "Cromwell will stand su-

preme. His enemies in beggarly exile—his friends seated in their room. Some snivelling Roundhead rooting himself here on this hearth." He sat forward, fiercely, grasping the arms of his oaken chair. "Here on this hearth, where I have fought my fight with Fate!"

He broke off. Then: "And where I'll win it," he said slowly. "I'll win it yet."

He spoke with a restless, strange excitement, which again puzzled good Colonel Petre, who was used, however, to be puzzled by his dominating friend, and respected him always so much the more.

"Surely we will win it," he assented sturdily. "Thou and I, old friend, and——" A shout of laughter broke out again in the court and, chiming in with it, the old soldier concluded: "And that brood of fighting cocks to help us that's crowing so loud out yonder. And dear Dick Arden to captain them. Dick Arden—ah!"

Colonel Petre sat up. Dick Arden's name had recalled to his mind a reluctant promise that had been wrung from him that morning. Should he speak now? He stole a look at his old friend. Roger looked mighty glum this afternoon. What of that? No day like today, more especially when Hales' unsoldierly but very expert sharp-shooters might pick off

an old colonel before to-morrow. Colonel Petre cleared his throat and prepared to unmask his battery.

"Speaking of Dick Arden, Roger——" He paused. Sir Roger's mouth twitched into a sudden smile, but he said nothing to help Petre out, so the Colonel had to begin again.

"There's a chip of the old block, Roger! There's a soldier that any soldier would be proud to father. Dick Arden, Roger, your nephew, and—ahem!—your most worthy heir!"

Sir Roger stood up suddenly. He knew what was coming. He wished what was coming. But not for all he knew and all he wished could he calmly hear his brother's son named in his own son's place.

"Dick's a good lad," he said, "and Dick is my heir, but Dick is not my son." He stood with his back to Petre, looking down at a smouldering log.

Colonel Petre's diplomacy was exhausted. He came to the point.

"Dick fain would be your son," he said impressively, and waited.

There was a silence. Sir Roger with his heel kicked the log into a blaze, then turned and stood looking steadily at Colonel Petre.

"As I suppose," he said slowly, "Dick

Arden has opened to you his wish for my nearer alliance."

"He has," said Petre, "and prayed my influence with you and with my godchild Millicent. For yourself, Roger, you must have seen Dick's love for your child this many months."

"I have seen it," said Sir Roger slowly.

"And approved it, I cannot doubt," said Colonel Petre. "What husband so fit for your daughter as the heir of your line and a gallant soldier—and such a right good fellow, too—as Dick?"

"I have approved it," said Sir Roger. Yet there was something in his tone which even to blunt old Francis Petre held the matter in suspense.

Petre waited, therefore, while Sir Roger slowly paced the breadth of the hall and back, then stood looking down on him and spoke.

"I'll tell you more, Francis Petre. This is the very point I have fought with Fate: that a direct heir of my body should possess Thirlby after me. Fate took my son from me, and left me only my sweet maid, who may not herself sit in my place, very spirit of the Ardens though she be. But her marriage with my heir would give Thirlby to my daughter's son. So if her choice should light on Dick Arden,

it will remain only"—Sir Roger seemed to hesitate. He glanced at Petre. He went on —"only to make my grandson's might as secure as my grandson's right, to which end ——" Again he paused.

"All's well, then." Colonel Petre for once broke in upon his friend's deliberations and got to his feet, all aglow at his success in so delicate an embassage. "All's well, and nothing remains but——"

"Millicent!" said her father, and made a sign for silence.

Francis Petre turned and looked. Millicent Arden was crossing the hall behind them, making, as it were, a soft radiance in the gloom. There breathed from her a loveliness—at once of form and movement, and, as it seemed, of spirit also—which might call a young man's heart to leap from his bosom, and fling itself at her feet; and it brought, indeed, a dimness of fond pride to the eyes of the two old men who looked on her. The soft swaying of her satin gown and falling laces was in tune to the sweep of the long black lashes from beneath which her eyes exchanged thoughts with the written page she held. But though sweetness was there—in the blue eyes now veiled, in the creamy cheek which the veiling lashes nearly touched, in the soft springing and backward turning of the dark hair from off her temples—

yet sweetness was not all. There was a note of high spirit—of disdain. The small head rose from the shoulders with a flower-like pride—a pride so foolish, so fragile, it called for cherishing, for guidance, not reproof: as did the arched feet, that stepped they knew not whither, while the maid's heart was in her book.

Her old godfather would have called to Millicent as she passed. Her father silenced him, a hand on his arm.

"Let her be," he said, and Millicent passed out, as she came, her eyes on her book.

The old men's eyes had been so filled with Millicent, as eyes were wont to be, that they took no note of a little figure that was slipping along by her side.

Joan Arden was as well accustomed to being forgotten as was Millicent to being gazed upon, and she would take, when she could, small, bitter revenges by making her presence felt. The keen ear of the blind had told Joan of the presence of the two men whom Millicent had passed unknowing, and she lingered when Millicent passed out.

"No eyes but for her book, Roger," said Colonel Petre, rubbing his hands. "Now I'll wager that I know from whom she had the book she loves so."

"She had it from Ned Falconer!" cried out Joan Arden, small and shrill.

"Ned Falconer! I thought 'twas Dick. Who?—what?—who's Ned Falconer?" Colonel Petre, purple and stuttering with dismay, turned upon Sir Roger.

Sir Roger broke into a shout of laughter, and took his old comrade by both arms.

"Go, Joan!" he called over his shoulder, and as the door shut on her, "Sit down, man! sit down," he cried, pushing his friend into his chair, "and shut thy wide eyes and mouth, and——"

"Who is Ned Falconer?" gasped Petre.

"Ned Falconer," said Sir Roger, "is a ward of mine, on whom my daughter last set eyes when she was but twelve years old and he fifteen."

The old man who had Dick Arden's wooing so much at heart breathed again.

"But the book?" he persisted.

"The book of poems Ned Falconer sent to Millicent two years back, from the Hague, by my hands, for a Twelfth Night greeting."

"Faith!" said Petre, laughing, "that little tale-bearer Joan gave me a rare fright. But the fancy of a twelve-year-old child is safe enough. But this Falconer? Hath he been skulking out of England all the years of the rebellion? A strange ward for thee, Roger."

"No fault of Ned's," said Sir Roger, "that he has not fought it out with the rest of us. He came here all a-fire to serve his Majesty under me, in the year—the year——"

He stopped. Six years were passed, as has been said, since that sad morning, and many places once soft in Sir Roger's heart were now hard as stone. But not yet could he speak of that day, as a soldier is bound to speak—not to old Petre—not to his best friend.

"When Millicent was twelve," nodded Petre. "Ay! I know the year you mean. But why did you then refuse this Falconer for a recruit?"

"Because I saw clearly that Ned was not born to be a soldier," said Sir Roger. "No"—at a movement of contempt from Petre—"no fault in him. I tell you again, Ned's a good lad, but of a make I do not know, only I know 'tis not a soldier's make. I begged a place for him therefore with Lord Bingham, in his embassage to the King of Spain."

"You were mighty thoughtful, Roger," grumbled Petre, "making a career for this young non-combatant."

There was a pause, then:

"Ned was sister's son to my wife," said Sir Roger Arden.

"I see, I see," said Petre, hastily. "Your pardon!"

"And he is a youth of great parts and character, moreover," Sir Roger went on sturdily, "and one that hath been of infinite service to their Majesties in the career to which I put him."

"Service? How can a man serve King Charles but by fighting for him?" growled Petre incredulously.

"By conducting many delicate affairs in Spain and Italy and France. Latterly he hath served the Queen. 'Twas he brought off that matter of the fresh levy of troops for the Kentish rising," said Sir Roger coolly.

"He's content, that is to say—this lad of mettle—to be running footman to his Majesty when he might be his captain of horse," said Petre very hotly.

"True. He has that one point of a soldier, Petre," replied Sir Roger, "that the Roundheads have better than we."

"*Roundheads!* Better!" spluttered Petre, fixing starting eyes upon his friend.

"I mean obedience," said Sir Roger, and, as Colonel Petre sank back in his chair, with a mollified grunt: "Ned was my ward. He had my commands; it went hard with him, but he obeyed."

"Worthy youth!" sneered Petre. "And is he still your ward?—still under obedience?"

"Why, no," Sir Roger admitted. "He came of age three weeks ago."

"And remains a running footman and safe in foreign parts still." Old Petre triumphed now. "So much the better, then, for my friend Dick—and for all good soldiers of the King. For on whomsoever my godchild Millicent may deign to bestow her hand, it will never be upon a scheming young non-combatant! That I'll swear, and that I'll stand to!"

The great centre door of the hall was flung open as he spoke and Dick Arden tramped in, unslinging his musket from his shoulder and unbuckling his steel cap.

He stopped short at Colonel Petre's last words, and looked from one man to the other; then came forward.

"What non-combatant is this that you are swearing against, honoured sir?"

Dick Arden asked it with a covered smile, his kindly eyes fixed on those of his old well-wisher.

"Against Ned Falconer, my boy," grumbled Petre, "your uncle's ward that he tells me of. A youth of possessions and parts, that lives at ease across the sea, while we here fight and sweat."

"Ah!" said Dick, still smiling his half-rueful smile into the old man's angry eyes.

"And—and," insisted Petre hotly, "the same youth he is that sends poetry books to my godchild Millicent."

"Yes?" said Dick.

"And—and that is his own master now, and—and remains abroad," Petre concluded somewhat lamely.

"Ned Falconer is here," said Dick Arden.

CHAPTER IV

"NED FALCONER!"

Sir Roger leaped to his feet.

Colonel Petre fell back, staring, in his chair.

"*Ned Falconer!*" Their cry was echoed from the gallery which ran round the hall, which was reached by the wide oaken stair to one side of it, and upon which the chief bedchambers opened.

"Millicent! Millicent!" cried Joan Arden, in the gallery, beating upon her cousin's door, "Do you hear them? Ned Falconer is come!"

The door was opened with a quick, low cry. Joan ran in, the door shut, and no more was heard.

Dick had glanced up quickly at his sister's cry. At the cry of the other, who was not his sister, he looked suddenly down, as if pierced by some sharp thought. Then he turned a brave front to the older men.

"Ned's at the outer gate-house," he said cheerfully. "He would come no further, Uncle Roger, till he had your permission."

"Why is he here?" asked Sir Roger, "and how?"

"That's what you must ask himself," said Dick. "Shall I go bring him in?"

"Bring him, bring him," said Sir Roger, pacing impatiently to and fro.

Dick turned to go, then stopped.

"Joan!" he shouted, "Joan!"

His sister came to the door above.

Dick hesitated a moment—a thing that in him was most rare. At last:

"My cousin Millicent should don that brave gown of blue," he said, "to welcome Ned Falconer."

Joan ran back; there was a whisper, a rustle, a gush of choked, merry laughter. Then a voice called—not Joan's voice—a voice that shook and sparkled, and flowed over with its fill of delight.

"Dear Dick! wise Dick! Just so I am doing, as fast as ever I can."

"Ah!" said Dick, stood a moment again in thought, and then tramped out. . . .

Half an hour later Sir Roger had called for lights in the hall, and old Stocker, the steward, was maintaining against Bridget (Mistress Millicent's waiting-woman) his right to carry in the heavy silver candlesticks and have a look at Master Falconer.

For everyone in the house had heard by now that Master Ned had come back—had come back to strike his blow for the King, had come

back the first moment he was of age and free of Sir Roger's control, had come back with great news (everyone knew the news, too, and could give his neighbour full information and the lie direct upon that point) : and had come back, good lad, at greatest danger to life and liberty, making his way into Thirlby, under cover of the mist, right through the enemy's lines. And there he was in the great hall in close talk with Sir Roger and with old Colonel Petre and Captain Dick Arden, and unpacking all his great news.

And, pray, who had served the hall with lights ever since the siege began and took off all the men from house-service—who but herself ? asked Bridget indignantly.

Old Stocker was not indignant, for his part. He was cool, quite cool, even gentle : but very resolute.

There were lights, he said, and lights ; but since Bridget had thought fit to unearth in Master Falconer's honour the two great silver candlesticks—the last, the only pieces of Arden plate that had not been melted into money for the King—why those were clearly too heavy and too precious for any poor weak woman to carry about.

At which point Mistress Ursula Tuddenham (sweet Alice Arden's sister and now stern regent in her stead) walked into the still-

room with a brow of storm at the delay, and, marching off with a candlestick in each hand, left the steward and waiting-woman to reflect that they might have agreed to carry in one apiece.

Mistress Ursula Tuddenham felt in fact her own desires for a peep at the boy who had left in many hearts a kindly memory of his brief long-ago sojourn in Thirlby House, and who came now from the King and from the Queen —nay, from many courts of many kings and queens.

So she pushed open the door and entered the hall, half-blinded by the lights she carried.

There, bent close about the table in the dark, were the four men in eager conference: if it could be called a conference, where one young, buoyant, pulsing voice had all the say.

Sir Roger hushed that voice instantly, however, on the entrance of Ursula in her blaze of light; and, as instantly, the owner of the voice sprang up, detached himself from the dark group, and was by her side, relieving her of her load, greeting her, remembering her, with a joyous tender courtesy that made the hard-featured woman's eyes swim and her firm lips quiver.

But Ned Falconer had hardly set the candlesticks on the table before Mistress Ursula was gone. She knew that look on brother-in-law

Roger's face, and that it would not bear the smallest delay.

And as the door shut behind her, the three eager listeners closed again round Ned.

"And Sir Giles Calthorpe?" asked Sir Roger.

"Sir Giles Calthorpe can promise you no relief," said Ned.

There was a growl of contempt at this from Petre. Ned turned to him eagerly.

"Sir Giles is hemmed in too close himself. There's nothing for it, he bade me say, but for you—for *us*"—on that word his voice sprang into joy—"to fight it to the death."

"You saw Sir Giles himself?" asked Sir Roger, composedly.

"Not only so. I have his message in writing," answered Ned, and he drew a small folded paper from his breast, saying: "You know his seal?"

"The Wreathed Dagger. Ay, ay," said the other three. "We all know the Wreathed Dagger."

Sir Roger took the paper, and, glancing at it, "I expected this refusal," he said.

"That did not I," said Dick with disgust.

"There's more wreath than dagger about Sir Giles Calthorpe nowadays," muttered Petre.

"The better wreaths for *our* swords then,"

laughed Ned, and Petre nodded: pleased, against his will, by the newcomer's spirit.

"And that's what even you will admit, honoured sir." Ned's voice took a note of almost passionate reverence, as he turned to his Uncle Roger, to the great soldier who—at last, in spite of himself—was to captain him.

"You'll admit that our wreaths are to be of laurel, sir, when you hear the bottom of my budget of news."

The young excited voice steadied to a deep exultation.

"What's that?" cried the others, catching their breath—yes, even Sir Roger—although they knew not why.

Ned looked this way and that, and then, in a low, quick, level voice:

"Colonel Hales outside there," he said, "is superseded to-day in his command. I heard it as I came through the rebel lines. You have kept him, sir," to Sir Roger, "too long outside your walls for his health."

"Superseded by whom?" came on a breath from all.

"By whom, sir?" Ned's young worshipping eyes were again upon Sir Roger. "Who should come against *you*, sir—who should come and be broken once more against *you*—who but one?"

"Cromwell!" cried Petre.

"Cromwell!" Dick Arden sprang to his feet with a wild shout.

"Cromwell!" whispered Sir Roger Arden, drew in a sharp breath, and sat silent—struck silent—sat looking darkly into the young eyes that looked into his with a dauntless confidence.

"The first time," breathed Ned, "since Naseby."

Naseby! At that name Sir Roger's eyes fell from their dark gaze with a shock—a shiver. At Naseby fight he and Cromwell had met as soldiers should, and now——

"Naseby!" cried Ned, on his feet. "Where's the sword? The sword that brought his Majesty alive out of Naseby fight?"

"You know the story?" cried Dick and Colonel Petre, while Dick reached Sir Roger's old sword down from the wall.

Sir Roger sat silent as before.

"Know it?" laughed Ned. "Have I a cousin Millicent that can write of the glories of her house? Or *had* I such a one, I should say, that *could* write in days gone by? For not one word has the little maid written me since one Twelfth Night two years back—when I sent her a gift, a book of verses, honoured sir, by your hands."

He spoke to Sir Roger, who sat silent, his

head sunk, his thoughts with his enemy: without the gates and—within.

Dick answered for him, though Dick's own voice, indeed, came this time something dry and harsh, to his own surprise.

"We have a cousin Millicent, Ned," he answered. "There she comes."

Ned turned to greet her as gladly, as kindly, as he had turned before to Mistress Ursula.

What did he see?

He could never say; he never knew. There must have been some moment, some swift passage in his life, from the time when he had not seen her to the time when his memory held no other image. But it was too swift, too blinding. Now—*now* he saw her for ever!

And Millicent?

She stood on the lowest stair, in the pale blue satin gown, and in all the poor adornments she had been busy with this half-hour past, which she must show to the fine gallant fresh from the French Court, for she must not appear to him a mere country beauty. And which the gallant never saw—poor things. She looked down in all her splendour into the hall—looking to find her Court gallant, who had sent her a book of verses. And this is what she saw:

A tall, thin, dishevelled, haggard figure—

splashed to the eyes in mud and drenched with rain—worn of feature by danger or by hunger, perhaps by both—altogether as forlorn-looking a being as had ever begged alms at her gate. She saw him move with an alert abruptness from table to hearth and back again, and in cold disappointment she denied him the eager charm that others saw. She heard his voice, that danced with gaiety or dropped to reverence; but heard it speak of herself carelessly, as of "a little maid," and she froze colder still in her self-esteem. And then Dick named her, and this most uncourtly gallant turned and looked at her. And she saw a look that changed, and lit, and darkened, and glowed again to a radiant immortal joy, and her own poor, foolish, little, wandering, curious look met it, and drowned—drowned without a cry. . . .

Sir Roger sat silent. Old Petre was pacing the hall, as if nothing had happened. Ned Falconer stood before her now, bending in a formal salutation.

Only Dick Arden looked at her strangely. But she did not see Dick Arden.

CHAPTER V

NED FALCONER had not been mistaken. While he, under cover of that misty evening, had been effecting his entrance into Thirlby, the besieging force had welcomed with hushed exultation the Lord-General of the Forces, Oliver Cromwell. And the morrow of that evening rose upon a changed world.

No more hare-brained excursions and alarms —mad tricks contrived by men of the garrison to "show the enemy there were soldiers within." The gay game of war which for seventeen weeks had been playing at Thirlby House was in one night steadied to a stern and ceaseless and resourceful business. For now in front of the fortress, formed by nature for a stronghold, was planted the soldier whom till now no stronghold had resisted. And now the fight was such as tests the inmost citadel—the soundness of the human wills engaged.

Lieutenant Lovel, that practised soaker, felt the change bitterly, and bitterly he complained of it to Dr. Bertram, who met him coming from the walls.

Dr. Bertram, it will be remembered, was Ned Falconer's tutor of former days. He had

been installed as chaplain at Thirlby when the sectaries drove him from his parish.

On the fifth morning after the arrival of General Cromwell on the scene of action there was for the first time a lull in his attack. Dr. Bertram was walking alone in the Long Gallery, when he saw a lank, lugubrious figure come stalking towards him from the south door, and he presently recognised in it his sometime rollicking acquaintance, young Gilbert Lovel.

Dr. Bertram was a kindly, scholarly, easy-going man, accustomed to extend a large indulgence to the infirmities of harassed cavaliers, and, supposing Gilbert Lovel to be to-day in the melancholy stage of drink, he would have passed him by with an unexacting smile. But when, at closer quarters, he discovered that Lovel was quite sober, a word of startled praise escaped the good-humoured old doctor unawares.

"Sober!" growled Lovel, with a distinctness of articulation which in him almost amounted to a disguise. "Ay, dead sober, and sober these twenty-four hours past. Wouldn't you take your oath, doctor, that Noll Cromwell was commanding us here? Us here within the walls—us gentlemen of the King, instead of his snivelling Rusty-pots without!"

"Rusty-pots being a pleasantry for their self-chosen name of Ironsides? Good! good!"

Dr. Bertram pursued his policy of encouragement. "See now, Gilbert, how moderation at the wine-cup hath burnished up thy wit. Even so, be sure, it hath steadied and strengthened thine arm. Sir Roger hath foreseen this great benefit doubtless, and hath taken his measures accordingly."

"Taken his measures!" cried Lovel. "A plague on him and on Mr. Nephew-Envoy Falconer, and on all their measures and moderations! They have taken their moderate measures truly! He and Ned Falconer were at it yesterday like two tapsters, figuring out how long the liquor will last! And how many months—months! quotha!—we may sit mum and mewed within these walls, while Noll Cromwell hammers on our outer shell! And the end of their moderate measures is one miserable half-pint a man a day. And that never till five o' the clock! A plague, I say again, on all measures and moderations, and huzza for the old ways! A full skin! A mad charge! A short life and a merry one! 'Tis that made us what we are, doctor!"

"And *where* we are, Gilbert!" replied the old man sadly. And looking on the ruin of the man he loved, and thinking of the ruin of a cause, he drew Lovel aside into the deep recess of a window and pointed to the distant, quiet, but encompassing lines of the enemy.

"Cut off we are, Gilbert," he said, "from our King's service. Surrounded, enmeshed, and useless!"

"Useless! No," cried a firm voice, and at its sound Dr. Bertram turned to face his former pupil.

Ned Falconer had come up to them unperceived. His hands were full of papers, and his demeanour had something of the sober stillness belonging to his recent occupation—in strong contrast to the heat and fret of Lovel's. Ned's aspect, indeed, was in material respects far more prosperous than when we saw him last. He was not now wet, nor cold, nor hungry, and his dress and carriage (though simple still) had something of the care and grace to be looked for in a man whose moulding years had been spent at a Court. But against this gain there was to be set a very heavy, though indefinable, loss. What was it had so dimmed the glancing gaiety of his eye? What had damped the hopeful voice?

Resolution remained, whatever else was gone, and gentleness, too, as he smiled at his old tutor and maintained his point against him.

"We're not useless, surely, reverend sir," and pointing where Dr. Bertram had pointed before: "Look, sir," he said, "where stays yonder subtle master of men!"

"Now if it's Noll Cromwell you're meaning," broke in Lovel, "I'll have you know, Master Falconer, that Noll's no master of mine."

"Nor of any within these walls," replied Ned. "And therefore look at him, I say! How he's forced to linger there, to stay, to delay, to imperil who knows what dark schemes of treason! And how forced? Why? Because he dares not go on in that triumphal progress from the North to London while he leaves an enemy like Sir Roger in his rear! Cromwell holds Sir Roger, Doctor, as you were truly saying. But Sir Roger is holding General Cromwell!"

"Faith, that's true," cried Lovel, and was instantly sorry he had spoke. He had his own opinion of Mr. Politician Falconer, and had only agreed with him by accident.

But Dr. Bertram, too, had his own opinion of his boy Ned, and, looking on him very kindly, "There's something, lad," he said, "in that notion of thine."

"Something?" cried Ned. "Something that will grow, please God, to more and yet more. We have but to keep of one mettle, we the blade with Sir Roger the hilt, and that dark master of men will find *his* master yet in Sir Roger."

The light and life had come back to Ned

Falconer's eye and voice. Dr. Bertram smiled to see it.

"You at least have found yours," he said. "You have found your captain in your kinsman." The old man went on, without noting the sudden change, the dimming cloud of sadness, that passed again over Ned at these words. "You have found your manhood's master in Sir Roger Arden, and your boyhood's master will not quarrel with that. Far from it, Ned. I was upholding, with our friend Gilbert Lovel here, Sir Roger's prudent measures, and thine own."

No sooner were the last three words spoken than the simple old man saw their imprudence.

But too late. Ned Falconer's quick disclaimer was drowned in the instant clamour of Lovel's wrath.

"*His* measures! Mr. Envoy Falconer's measures! Here's insolence with a witness! A raw recruit of yesterday taking measures with the tried soldiers of his Majesty! I'll take measures with you, Master Plenipotentiary Falconer, of a nature to teach you your place," and he half drew his sword.

But Ned, eager and stammering—the old trick when one feeling trod another too hard—cried, looking upon Lovel with an earnest and modest warmth: "Will—will Captain Lovel—will he so far honour me? Will he teach me my

place—in the next sortie—what lowest place in his troop he will then assign me ? "

Lovel stared, still fingering his hilt—baulked of his quarrel, his ground cut from under him, angry, and angriest with the thing in himself that was pleased, despite himself, with "the Envoy."

"I don't know that I take your meaning," he said at last, grudgingly. "But you can find your way cleverly out of a quarrel, Master Falconer. Heaven send you don't find it as cleverly out of a fight."

He gave one glance to see if this last match would spring to a flame. But no; Falconer's eyes were fixed gravely upon him, but his lips were closed.

Lovel took off his hat with a twirl, which began with the Doctor, but somehow found itself bound to include Ned Falconer, planted it again very exactly upon his brows, hummed a tune, and so swaggered off down the length of the gallery and away.

Dr. Bertram, turning his humorous, kindly eyes upon Ned Falconer, was amazed at the emotion he read in his face.

"Why, Ned," he cried, "never give a thought to Lovel's rough speaking. He's testy, lad, testy. Gilbert Lovel's a good soldier, and that all round the clock, both in his cups or out of them. But out of his cups (as Sir Roger

is keeping him out of them to-day) you must not look to find him an easy comrade."

Ned made no reply, and Dr. Bertram, anxious at all costs to restore the peace which his unwise words had endangered, urged him again.

"For Lovel's taunt, dear lad, never think of it. He's man enough to beg thy pardon for it from his heart"—the old man smiled confidently—"after the next sortie."

Ned did not smile back, yet his look was not captious, nor yet sullen. Rather, as it were, an anxious, questioning look. Dr. Bertram lingered a moment, then, satisfied by Ned's quietness that there was no danger of a brawl, he withdrew.

Later, he greatly wished that he had made Ned Falconer speak that question, which he left now to his solitary thought.

It rankled in Ned's mind—that sharp self-questioning—like a thorn, as he stood alone by the window. It had been planted in him by Sir Roger Arden six years ago. A half-formed lonely, dreaming lad, but burning to exchange dreams for realities, he had been refused by Sir Roger the active soldier's life that he demanded, and flung back upon a politician's. Passionately he had asked, "Why?" And keenly he had seen through the shallow reasons Sir Roger gave for his refusal. It had been

present with him ever since that if a soldier like Sir Roger refused a recruit, it could be but for one shameful reason. And to cleanse himself of the stain of such a reason was the first use Ned Falconer had desired to make of his freedom from pupilage. For this he had made his way to Thirlby, and entered it at all risks. And now——

But now the door of the gallery opened again, and on the instant sad thoughts were no more. Hope and joy came in with Millicent Arden.

The Long Gallery where the breeze between Ned and Lovel had sprung up was a passage connecting the central hall of the house with the east wing. It was hung with portraits, chiefly of women, and was a favourite haunt of Millicent's. There as a child she had poured out histories of Thirlby House to the two new cousins, of whom Ned was so much the better listener. There, as a girl, she had first conned over her cousin Ned's letters to her from France—letters few and short, but always kind and merry. There, later, she had lost herself in dreams, among the proud and tender verses in the wonderful book which he had sent her—which he had sent, as it proved, with so much less thought than she gave to the receiving of it.

And there, for the past four mornings since Ned Falconer's return, Millicent had paced in

a dizzy bewilderment between truth and fancy. All the fancies of the past months or years had been false. She knew that now. Not one thought had the living man given her to the hundred she had given to his shadow. Ned's laughing voice, as he spoke of her that first night, had taught her the falseness of her fancies. But the truth? Was it truth? That unimaginable truth, that had sprung to life a minute later in his eyes?

This fifth morning Mistress Ursula had been very urgent with Millicent for help in some household cares. But what could a Tuddenham know of the cares of an Arden—of the Lady of Loyalty, as the cavaliers styled her, of the Queen of Thirlby garrison, intent on her own royal difficulties? So, in spite of Aunt Ursula, on this fifth morning Millicent came again to the Long Gallery.

She opened the door and saw Ned Falconer standing there in solitude, and with a look as if he, too, had perplexing thoughts, and sadder ones than hers. And at once she forgot her royal difficulties; she even forgot that she was a queen; she stood holding the door, not daring to come in and not wishing to go away. She wished so very much that she could serve him. So that when he looked up and saw her, and was so very glad at seeing her, this was greater to Millicent than the greatest thing

she had ever dreamed—that she had made him glad.

She came in at that, and shut the door, and as he came to meet her she said shyly: "You have sad thoughts, cousin. I am sorry," and then was afraid she had been too bold.

"They are gone," answered Ned. "They could not stay to make you sorry."

Then the same fear of over-boldness took him. "And I must be gone, too," he said, with great haste, and went quickly back to the window and picked up his hat that lay there.

But when he got back to the table, and was gathering up his papers there, he was, though very busy, not very quick. The minute was so golden. He had never been alone with her till now—never, all these five days.

"Are you going to my father again?" asked Millicent.

This was when he had all the papers—when there was nothing left but to go towards the door.

He stopped, his heart in his throat.

"Not till noon strikes," he said, and looked through his papers, frowningly.

"Will you not then bestow this half hour on me?" asked Millicent.

That was what she meant! To grant him his heart's desire. When he, like a boor,

had found no words to ask for it. He must find words now to thank her.

So he stammered: "If I dare—dare hope" —and could say no more.

"Why, you speak as if you received a favour," said Millicent, "when you are granting one." For when she saw him so glad of so small a thing, it made her feel ashamed.

To set him more at his ease, and to forgive him for having laughed at her, she laughed at herself, which was a strange thing for Millicent to do.

"You have forgot," she said. "The little maid loved talking of the glories of her house. How can she talk alone?"

He was to stay with her, then, and to play at taking these wonders for common facts of every day. He put down all his papers, and brought a chair for her to sit, and while his heart sang songs of joy that he was talking with her still, he stood before her, saying, with great decorum:

"I am your pupil again. Will you tell me more of Thirlby's glories?"

"Where shall I begin?" she asked. "Were there any left untold?"

"Begin here," said Ned. "Where you were used to end."

He stepped before a dim old painting which hung in the dimmest corner of that gallery.

He was thinking only that he must not stand and look at her too long : yet, if he had looked back before he spoke, he would have escaped hurting her. But he would not look, and she —she could not speak when she saw whose picture Ned had chosen, and so he went on unchecked :

" Poor Sir Guy, you used to call him. The only Arden who had no story. You were resolved when you grew up that you would find out his story, too, and tell it for him. Have you done so ? "

The question excused his looking at her again, and he cried out, " I crave your pardon," for he saw, all aghast, that her face was suffused with a flood of anger—or was it of shame ?

CHAPTER VI

THERE was a moment of stillness—on his part of sheer amazement—then Millicent rose very proudly.

She came and stood before Sir Guy Arden's picture. She was side by side with Ned now, but now it seemed that they were miles asunder. Her eyes looked burning defiance of any sympathy from his.

"I have found out Sir Guy's story," she said, "and I will tell it you if you choose."

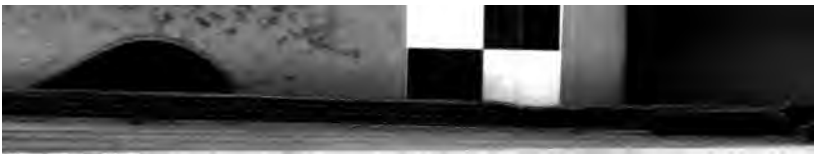
But he knew now that only some bitter shame could move her thus. So he said quietly, "I do not choose."

"But if I choose to tell it?" Millicent's tone was imperial.

"Then—I listen," said her cousin, with a grave respect.

She lifted her head and looked straight at the picture.

Something moved in the recess beyond the picture when Millicent said she would tell Sir Guy's story. But they were both too much engrossed to hear the sound. Ned had no eyes, ears, or thoughts but for Millicent—and she had none but for her enemy.



"Sir Guy Arden," she said fiercely, "was a traitor to his King. He held Thirlby for King Henry the Sixth. He thought that King Henry's cause was lost. And he was found at night—in treaty, by stealth, at night, with the Yorkist envoy. *His son* found him!"

Ned drew a sharp breath of horror.

She never stopped.

"His son raised the house on him—took him, and bound him, and kept him close—and held the house himself for King Henry. Till he died. That is, till the son died. Then the traitor was free. Then Edward the Usurper would have been received in triumph here. But Edward died. And Richard killed, and soon *was* killed. And no Yorkist traitor"—her voice rose to triumph—"ever entered Thirlby, except"—it dropped again—"except Sir Guy himself. *The traitor!*"

The maid had thrown it all to Ned—in short, hard sentences, over her shoulder—had thrown it rather at the picture, never looking round at Ned: looking at the hated picture, delivering the last two words straight in the picture's teeth.

Then, with a catch in her breath: "We have been—honest—since," she said.

"I have hurt you." Ned spoke shortly, finding it hard to speak at all, so much the

sight of her shame and pain hurt him. To himself he was vowing that shame should never come nearer to her if pain of his could ward it off.

But his words woke Millicent to a sense of her injustice.

"It was not you hurt me," she said, "it was—*traitors*."

And two tears brimming her burning eyes, she dashed them quickly away and smiled, and said again, "It was not you," and held out her hand to him, and forgave him for not being in the wrong.

Very formally and humbly Ned Falconer saluted the pardoning hand, and, as he raised his head from doing so, he saw at the farther door Dick Arden, who had come in, and stood still there—only a moment—there in the doorway, looking at the two.

When Millicent, too, saw her cousin, the familiar kindly presence brought a quiet to her new bewildering world.

"Dick!" she cried, gratefully, as it were. "I *am* glad!"

Dick came along the gallery to them then, and his cousin Millicent was openly wiping her eyes, while Ned Falconer looked on in a sympathy as open. He did not understand this. But Dick had given up thinking that he understood things since the day, about six months

back, when he had found out that he did not understand himself—when he had come upon his cousin dreaming over a book sent to her by Ned Falconer, and had discovered, with a suddenly darting fear, that he wanted to marry his cousin Millicent as much as he wanted to fight—if not more.

There was no reason, however, that he should not try to understand what was grieving his cousin this morning. So he asked her.

"You know," said Millicent, and she looked towards the picture of the Arden traitor.

Dick turned with her and looked, and then laughed comfortably.

"*That* old story!" he said, and he turned to Ned Falconer, in explanation, so he meant it, of Millicent's mood.

"A bad spot on my family history is like a bad tooth in my head, to my mind. Out with it, and done with the ache!" So said the heir of the Ardens. "But maybe I'm wrong. It was never the Ardens' way. Not with old Sir Guy here. No. They hang him away up here in the dark, among the women. Sir Roger won't have him mentioned, and my cousin Millicent would no more name his name——"

He was interrupted by a placid voice from a distant window recess.

"But my cousin Millicent *has* named his name, brother, just now. She has been telling Ned Falconer all about Sir Guy."

Millicent frowned and bit her lip, while Ned, surprised, looked round in search of the speaker. But the one person deeply stirred by this discomposing correction was Dick Arden.

For one half-minute he frankly stared at his cousin Millicent. How this intimate confidence which she had shown in Ned Falconer pressed home the other darting fear! But he turned his eyes towards the further recess and spoke with stern disgust.

"Come out of that corner, Joan. And keep your tales for them that love tale-bearers."

The blind girl emerged, gently groping her way towards her brother, who confronted her white face and frail young figure with the feeling of powerless irritation which she loved to rouse in others.

"You are mistaken, brother," she said mildly. "There is no tale-bearing in *that*. Why should not Cousin Millicent speak with Ned Falconer on what subject pleases her?"

"Why, indeed?" echoed Millicent, and turning to Ned she asked haughtily: "Is there any other picture whose story you would have me tell?"

But Dick's bluntness was not readily put in the wrong by his little sister's cunning.

"That's not the thing in point, Joan," he said. "The thing in point is my sister. I do not choose that my sister should sit and listen in corners unseen and carry what she hears."

With that he would have done, and have left the others to their talk. But Joan's clinging hand upon his arm detained him, as she persisted, with the same air of innocent surprise.

"But there was nothing for me to carry, brother. Nothing, the whole morning long. Here have been only"—she appeared to be searching in her simple recollections—"only Dr. Bertram and Lieutenant Lovel—Dr. Bertram amazed to find the Lieutenant sober. And as for"—she hurried now, quick and clear, for Dick was angrily unfastening her grasp from his arm—"as for Lieutenant Lovel calling Ned Falconer a *coward*——"

The flash of amazement that turned the eyes of both cousins upon Ned's face was no quicker than the quick colour rising there to corroborate Joan's tale.

"As to that," Joan's small, weary voice resumed, after a pause—she might have been hearing and pausing to relish their look—"as

to that, Ned Falconer has begged the Lieutenant's pardon for it, as I think." She laughed softly. "So there will be no lives lost." She paused again upon the silence that followed, and then began her quiet tentative movement towards the door.

But she was not to part so.

As she stepped, smiling to herself, past Ned Falconer, there rose in him, from depths not dreamed of in Joan's philosophy, a sorrow for this feeble creature who took no joy but in giving pain. Moved by it to the small no-service—the only thing—in his power, he overtook and passed her, reached the door first, opened it, and stepping back stood, hat in hand, his head bent, holding the door for her to pass out.

It was a strange moment for Joan. Knowing Ned's step, and hearing the ceremonious action, she thought, in the first fierce flash, that she was being mocked. Arrested, her slight form strung to its height by rage, she stood defying him, her blind face turned implacably towards his. Then a doubt took her. Her head drooped. She breathed a soft, uncertain, wondering "Oh." Her hand went out into the dark, and found itself taken with quiet goodwill. She was guided over the threshold, and heard the door gently closed behind her.

And she stood outside breathless, listening —listening to the sound of Ned Falconer's step as he went back to meet her injury; listening, till suddenly she felt that she was listening, and hurried away, ashamed.

CHAPTER VII

How often, in her noonday dreams in the Long Gallery, had Millicent Arden pictured herself the centre of a scene like this. Rival suitors, a tale-bearer, an accusation—all these were incidents familiar to her fancy. Yet her one immediate wish, on meeting with them in fact, was to convey herself away out of hearing. She was halfway to the north door before her cousin Joan had reached the south, and before Dick Arden called her back.

"Stay, cousin," Dick said. "Since you have heard my sister's tattle against Falconer, it's his due that you should stay with me and hear him give it the lie."

So recalled, Millicent covered her tumult of spirits with the loftiest air of negligence she could summon up.

"As you will," she answered, and she came back, but not to Dick. She crossed into the window recess, and throned herself on the low window seat there. She was all abroad, and this was unlike any dream, for in her dreams she had been altogether at home. At least she need not look at the man who was coming back to them down the length of the gallery,

to clear himself of the accusation. He would clear himself, and then she would be at home again. And meanwhile she would not look; she would sit as beseemed an Arden. She looked out of the window, therefore, across the quiet meadows, to the mounds where a glimmer of steel here and there showed the movements of Cromwell's men.

Dick, meanwhile, an old campaigner, wasted not one moment of his short snatch of rest. Shifting his sword, he flung his broad hat upon the table and himself into a great chair near it, and there, very comfortably settled, one leg thrown across the other, he smiled up at Ned as he came slowly back to them.

"Come, lad," he cried, "tell us! What drachm of truth was in that pound of fable?"

Ned remained standing—as a man might who felt himself on his defence.

"I do not know," he said.

"*Not know?*"

Dick looked up surprised.

Millicent, shaken from her show of remoteness, turned her eyes quickly from the window and looked at Ned.

"Something passed," Ned went on, recalling the matter, with knit brows, point by point. "I gave Lieutenant Lovel, unknowingly, some offence. I made him the apology due to his

Majesty's good soldier. This he took as showing that I lacked courage."

"And you?" cried Dick. He brought both feet smartly to the floor, and sat up active and alert.

"I?" echoed Ned, and looked back at Dick with inquiry.

"What had you to say to his insult?" demanded Dick Arden, hotly.

"Nothing," answered Ned.

"*Nothing!*" The incredulous cry came from Millicent Arden.

Ned glanced at his beautiful lady, sitting far away from him. Her voice was quivering, her eyes were ablaze.

Then he looked steadily back at Dick.

"What should I say?" he asked.

"Why——" Dick Arden opened his mouth to speak. Then he shut it, and reflected. He sat forward and stared down at the good oak floor. He sat back and stared up at the good oak ceiling. But neither there nor here did he find the thing that he should say. He was Falconer's senior officer, and he knew that Falconer did bravely well to refuse provocation to a brawl in the garrison. But Ned's kinsman! He was Ned's kinsman, too! Would he have his kinsman pocket up an insult?

In default, then, of finding the right thing to say, Dick Arden said nothing.

Not so his cousin Millicent. She had read and dreamed to purpose now. She had her lesson pat, and spoke it.

She rose to her feet—not looking indeed at Ned. Looking at Ned might have made her forget her lesson. She looked straight before her, and she spoke without a tremor or a doubt.

"A soldier needs no schooling," said Millicent, "how to kill a lie against his honour—if it be a lie!"

Her head held high, her trembling hands tight-clenched, she swept past Ned Falconer, past her cousin Dick, down the gallery, and away, and never paused till she had closed and locked and barred her own door upon herself.

And the men, left alone, looked at each other, and each, without knowing it, asked the other's pardon for her.

Dick was the first to speak.

"We do better without the women," was his unloverlike comment.

But to Ned Falconer Millicent's bitter speech meant more than a woman's mood—than the mood even of the woman beloved.

"You forget," he said, speaking with the painstaking exactness which he had used in relating Lovel's insult. "That doubt of my courage which my kinswoman has spoken, she learnt it from a man."

"Lovel? Lovel's a fool!" threw in Dick.

He spoke lightly, but Ned Falconer had that to say which was not light.

He stood awhile silent—a silence that in some way made itself felt. So that Dick Arden turned and looked at his cousin as he stood silent by the table. Ned stood, looking down at the table, his brows knit, his mouth close shut: looking down at the table, laying his hand down on it once or twice, and lifting it again in an absent way. A very trivial occupation. Yet Dick Arden waited for the end of it with a curious suspense.

Suddenly Ned looked at him across the table, straight and steadily.

"*Sir Roger Arden* doubts my courage," he said, in a voice as clear, as controlled, as his unflinching gaze.

"*What!*" Dick sprang to his feet with the cry.

"Sir Roger Arden refuses to let me serve upon the walls." The voice was steady still, but dull now, and dead. It had done its task.

Dick strode up to his cousin, and, laying his two hands on his shoulders, began:—

"Why, lad?"

But when he met that steady look he found no more to say. He gave the shoulders a kindly grip and shake, dropped his hands, and walked away. He could not laugh cheerily as he

would have chose to do, for now he could not doubt that the thing his cousin had told him was the thing his cousin knew. And it was not in Dick Arden's nature to proffer a sham salve to a real wound.

A little way off he paused, turned, and questioned soberly.

" How do you know, dear lad, of this—mistake—of Sir Roger's ? "

At that word " mistake " the blood leaped to Ned's brow and the tears to his eyes, and if he could have died for Dick Arden that moment he would have been happy. It was with a totally different voice—a voice changed and broken by hope—that he stammered out :—

" I—I—I've seen it—a thousand ways—all these years—under all his pretexts—pretexts, forsooth, of finding *better* uses for me ! "

The last words Ned spoke with a bitter scorn, but Dick caught at them eagerly.

" There's that, lad. That's true ! See ! A brainpiece such as thine can serve his Majesty better ways than being battered or blown to bits like——"

" Like a soldier's and a gentleman's ! " cried Ned hotly. And Dick's heart went with him in the cry.

" So says my uncle," Ned resumed, with a quiet more bitter. " With such pretences he sent me, and kept me, abroad—hiding me from

shame. With such pretences he keeps me—here! Keeps me among plans and papers! Keeps me—*safe!*"—his voice broke at that—"with Dr. Bertram and the women!"

Dick did not look at him then. He could not. And besides, he need not. He knew now what it was he had to do, so he set about doing it.

He went and fetched his hat from the table, put it on, and walked to the door. But there he stopped, reflected, and changed his purpose.

"I'll not go to my uncle yet," he said, "upon this matter of *ours*, dear lad. I'll back first to the walls. I do not like this silence to-day of Noll Cromwell's."

"Nor I," cried Ned. "I'll back to the tower, for the help of Dr. Bertram's glass."

"Good," said Dick Arden. "There's hot work brewing, I guess—enough for us all. And as sure as my name's Dick Arden, thou shalt strike thy blow, Ned, with the rest."

But at that Ned came up with him, stopped him, and looking steadily upon him, with eyes that loved and thanked, and yet defied him:—

"Do you know, Dick," he said, "who it is that I shall fight for, when I fight, *besides* the King?"

"Who?" said Dick.

"Millicent Arden," said Ned.

"There's a pair of us then," answered Dick. "Shake hands upon it."

And as Ned grasped the hand he held out, he added, with a queer remembering smile: "I knew that, lad, before——" He paused.

"Before what?" cried Ned.

"Before either o' you did," said Dick Arden.

CHAPTER VIII

It was late afternoon of the same day, and some half-score of the garrison, just come off guard, were making short work of their poor apology for a dinner. They had come to their meal so late as to bring to it a double appetite, and their magnificent hunger was confronted, for the second time, by half-rations of food and drink.

Yesterday the new short-commons rule had been a joke--a poor joke, but no worse; for yesterday's abstinence had struck upon bodies well padded by the full meals of the day before. But it was otherwise to-day. This day had begun with a wandering sensation of insufficiency, of lack: a sensation which had grown with the growing day, with the prolonged hours of inactive sentry work: which had been forgotten for awhile, indeed, by the happy handful who had had a short brush with the enemy: but which had leaped to the front in every man of the garrison at the word of "Dinner-time!"

And *this* was dinner!

Colonel Petre, straight as a tough old lance, sat at the head of the table, which was set in

the wide, empty hall. And when the scraping of spoon upon platter ceased, the Colonel looked down two lines of hungry men, and saw one and another furtively pull in his belt buckle a hole or two.

When he saw that the old soldier changed his position. He leaned forward, his arms resting on the table in front of him, his hands loose-clasped—a picture of leisurely after-dinner comfort. And sitting so, he smiled down one line of men and up the other, a quiet smile of content, which gathered to him all eyes (even the remonstrant eyes of Lovel at the table-foot), all awake to learn the good news which must lie behind such a smile.

"Well, gentlemen," said Colonel Petre, "we all know what this means."

His tone of hearty good fellowship carried such conviction that Lovel, in muttering "Not I!" detached himself from the others and stood away as an eccentric. Arthur Mainwaring, Tom Cornwallis, Jessop, and the rest went along with old Petre, and were very sure that they knew his cheerful meaning, while glad to have him tell it them more distinctly.

"It means three things," went on Petre, and he checked them off on his fingers as he came to them.

"First, that we have given Noll, in his first four days, more hard knocks than he has

yet digested, and have sickened him of any further attempt to storm us. Second, that his stillness since shows us his present plan. That is, to starve us or to stop our water. And third "—having reached his middle finger, Petre held it up to the tableful, with a jolly laugh —" third, gentlemen, that Sir Roger, whom Heaven preserve to us, is one too many for Noll Cromwell on that point, too. And is about proving to him that we can drub him with our bellies half-empty—as we could with our right hands tied behind our backs."

He thrust back his chair, and Lovel himself led the loud " Hurrah ! " which, along with the hammering of empty drinking cans upon the board, brought them all merrily to their feet.

They had still an hour's respite, and when Colonel Petre marched away to enjoy his half-ration of twenty winks, some of the others clustered about the hearth, to make the best of their half-ration of fire.

" It's true enough Noll was at work to-day to draw away our water," said Jessop ; " but Cornwallis has put a spoke in *that* wheel for him."

" How was that, Corny ? " cried Lovel, cured now of his fit of spleen, and glad to praise a fight, if he had not had the luck to share in it.

But Cornwallis (surely Fortune's own darling to-day) had been given a screw of tobacco, and sitting at rest behind his own cloud, left his glory to anyone that cared for it.

Arthur Mainwaring spoke for him.

"You know the thicket of dwarf-oak on the little knoll that covers the roundheads to the west?" And he pulled out a stick of the precious fire and some charred cinders with which to map out his tale.

"Well, then," he went on, "Dick Arden he says at noon to-day that he'll eat his hat and boots without sauce if Cromwell isn't working some new devilry in the dark, and that'll be the meaning of his stillness. And while Dick keeps the rest of us at double watches, as you know, he lets Tom Corny there steal out, with orders to have his ears about him even more than his hands. And he must make out what's doing behind that cover, and bring word home of it at all costs. So Corny and his half-dozen they creep along by the little fringed brook—as it might be *here*—that curves round the oak-thicket—*there*. And before ever they get up to the thicket, they can hear the picks going—and going, if you please—to a *chant!*"

A roar of laughter greeted this example of fanaticism surmounting prudence.

"So Corny steals me round the flank of the knoll and peers ahead. And there are some

five-and-twenty of the rascals at work, as open and as cool as you please, sinking a fall, to drain and open our spring, that comes from that west side. Now, keep you in mind this—that in the strict letter of Dick's command, it was Cornwallis's main duty to get news to Dick of the enemy's doings, and not risk an alarm till that was done."

"What!" broke in Lovel, "and leave 'em within striking distance—untouched?"

Mainwaring's gaunt face twinkled joyfully. "That's his *orders*," he said. "What d'ye think Tom *does?* He takes out of one breeches pocket one of Mistress Joan Arden's trained pigeons, and out of the other he takes an inkhorn and a pen. And there, in the dry ditch, within breathing sound of the roundheads, five to one, he sits him down, like any scrivener, and writes him out a billet, 'Thare steling owre wotter,' he writes, tucks it under the bird's wing, and ups and lets her fly: and falls that same moment with his five men upon the roundheads' five-and-twenty, with such a hurly-burly and hullabaloo that the enemy don't strike six blows before they take to their heels and run—leaving their picks, their shovels, and their sunken shaft to tell their own tale against 'em."

Mainwaring stopped for breath, and his listeners burst out in acclaim of "Corny!

Tom Corny!" and from behind Cornwallis's cloud came one satisfied chuckle — nothing more.

But Mainwaring was not done with his friend Tom Corny yet.

He got upon his feet with his back to the fire, facing his comrades with a slow wink, and fumbling searchingly in his right-hand pocket. "Is there any of you gentlemen now," he asked, "that has ever seen Tom Cornwallis's hand of write?"

On the word Cornwallis was out of his chair with a roar, and with a bound which would have landed him upon Mainwaring's right arm. But Jessop caught him midway: they two rocked in struggle for half a minute—the precious pipe crashing down meanwhile and crunching underfoot: the other men surged round Mainwaring, who waved a paper aloft, shouting: "Have a look at it, then! Here 'tis! Dick gave it me!" Tom Cornwallis heaved, and lifted, and hurled Jessop from his path, and was himself the first to snatch the letter. And in the free fight that followed he very shortly saw the damaging evidence reduced to shreds, quite too small to bring into contempt any gentleman's scholarship.

Satisfied of that, Tom contentedly left them the pieces, and turned back to his chair and to the wrecks of his shattered pipe. And thus it

was Tom Cornwallis who first was made aware of a new arrival on the scene.

Just inside of the door that led to the kitchens he stood—a good-humoured looking, round-faced young fellow, in a smock frock and gaiters. He was fingering his hat with awkwardness, but grinning nevertheless from ear to ear, with hearty glee at just such a rough-and-tumble game as came within his understanding. Here was fresh sport.

"Gentlemen and cavaliers!" cried out Cornwallis in a ringing voice, at which all stopped and turned, and followed his look. Cornwallis saluted the yokel with a flourish of his hat, and with a bow whose grace had been a boast, in better days, of the palace of St. James.

"We are honoured," he said. "An ambassador, I perceive, from the Council of State-Infamy in London! Twin-brother, if I may judge from his looks and lofty carriage, to His Excellency the Lord-General himself."

Through the laugh that followed the countryman waited in silence, staring from one to another of the noisy crew. But he spoke slowly and stolidly as soon as he could get a hearing, and what he said was much to the purpose.

"A be a honest man," he said. "A be John Stubbs. A bring a message to Thirlby garrison-folk from one Sir Giles Calthorpe."

From Calthorpe! The frothy horse-play dropped at that name to a sudden hush. The laugh born of hunger and a reckless spirit was caught and choked by something new—something strange. From Calthorpe! From the relief that had seemed to fail them! From the friend who had made pretence that he could leave his friends in the lurch! From Calthorpe! After all! And—yes—it was hope—this unfamiliar thing, that took men by the throat and left them without a word to say.

Only a look, a long breath, and in a moment all was alert, quiet movement. Jessop was speeding off to find Sir Roger with the news; Lovel was rigorously looking into the messenger's credentials, since what more likely than some device of the enemy lurking under this disguise? The others, clustered round Lovel, as before round Mainwaring—but with what a difference!—were passing from one to another in whispers each scrap of news they could glean.

For some minutes—long, endless minutes of suspense—of waiting for Sir Roger, the emotion of the cavaliers was as still as it was strong. But it burst all bounds when Sir Roger came. When the door opened to admit him it broke even that rein of discipline never before relaxed in Sir Roger's presence. When he strode into the hall he stopped short—met,

for the first time in his life, not by the instant order, the silence, the attention that were his due, but by a hubbub of feeling that rose up round him, pressing on him.

First a broken cheer—then confused shouts —scraps of news.

"Calthorpe." "It's Calthorpe, Sir Roger." "Yes! Calthorpe has pounded Hales to bits!" "Calthorpe's coming." "He's on his way."

Then, from Lovel, who struggled to make a way to his leader through the press. "Yes, Sir Roger! It *is* Calthorpe, sir, sure enough! Here's his seal! Here's the Wreathed Dagger!" And at that a great shout from all, "Hurrah! hurrah for the Wreathed Dagger!" till the roof rang to it.

And in the midst there stood Sir Roger—silent. He waited till the cheer had died away —till it had died to an uneasy silence under the silence of Sir Roger—till the men were beginning to look at each other, and to wonder at each other. Then he spoke quietly:—

"I am indebted, gentlemen," he said, "to your indulgence, for admitting me to a share in this news, which was sent, as I perceive, to the men of the garrison, and not to its commander."

At his words the men fell away from him on every side. He passed slowly between them, and across the hall until he reached the hearth.

There he paused, and with great deliberation adjusted a log on the fire.

When he turned from this occupation and faced round upon the hall, the men of the garrison had disappeared.

He was alone with the messenger.

CHAPTER IX

WHEN Colonel Petre felt keenly, it was his habit to speak strongly. And strongly and doggedly did he stick to his point when he got Sir Roger alone two hours later; but the more Petre urged him the less did Sir Roger Arden answer, till the conversation dropped at one time to a soliloquy.

Colonel Petre pointed out finally that Sir Roger's stern formalism with the men had given a hurt to loyal and kindly hearts, such as tends to kill the spirit of a defence. When this, too, was received in silence, Colonel Petre took a chair, drew it straight opposite his friend, sat down, and said:

"I'm no politician like thee, Roger, nor no strategist neither; but I'm an older captain. I know my roaring boys to their hearts' core, and I stand to it that this afternoon you were wrong with 'em, Roger. *Wrong!*"

The old soldier struck a sounding blow on the table with his big fist, sat back, and prepared to receive his superior's rebuke.

And for all reply Sir Roger quietly lifted

his eyes, and fixed his old companion, with an intent, pondering, measuring look.

Petre fumed awhile under this silence, and presently resumed with heat: "If the boys were a bit flighty or so, was that a time to visit it on 'em? Flighty! Who wouldn't ha' been flighty! Such a puff of good news may well make the head spin, when there's so little ballast in the hold." The old man thrust his two hands under his belt and laughed. "Faith, I'm flighty with it myself," he said.

A new thought then twinkled in his kind old eye, and, dropping his tone of remonstrance, he leaned forward, and tapped Sir Roger confidentially on the elbow.

"As to that, friend Roger," he said, "d'ye know what the best of the boys out there are saying now of *you?* What they give out to be *your* reason for reaching them such a rough set-down?"

On that Sir Roger spoke, and with eagerness.

"What's my reason," he asked, "in the heads of these wise gentlemen?"

"Faith! It's not in *your head* they find the reason, Roger, nor yet in your heart. They think too kindly of you still—save for one or two of the more cross-grained that take it hard. But Cornwallis and Lovel and Jessop are

passing it off with the rest—that the commandant was just aching sore for lack of a good dinner."

Sir Roger smiled an unmirthful smile.

"Let them take it so," he said.

"And am I to take it so, too?" asked Petre.

Again there was no answer, and the old man, quite at an end of his short tether of patience, got up with an angry shrug, pushed his chair back with a clatter, and was halfway to the door when Sir Roger rose and came after him.

"Wait a while, Francis," said he; "come and sit. I have been thinking, and I will tell you the reason of my shortness with these gentlemen, and I make it my request that you will carry it to them."

Petre looked undecided till the word "request" was spoken. Then he yielded, came back, and settled to hear.

"This Stubbs," began Sir Roger, "comes to me with a letter from Calthorpe, which letter contains true tidings, written for my eye alone. These I give to the garrison or withhold from it at my discretion. But the numskull messenger picks me up beside a parcel of lies by the way. And these he spreads broadcast among the men. Such tales as this: that Calthorpe has met and defeated Hales—a lie!

That Calthorpe is in full march to our relief—another lie! And every one of these lies is swallowed by these credulous hot-heads of ours for truth. And so a false notion of the whole state of matters gets abroad among 'em. And this mounts to their empty heads, and dizzies and maddens 'em. As if we two"—Sir Roger was speaking persuasively now—"as if we two had not a mad enough handful to hold in 'em already. And so—do you follow me?"

He paused, Peter reflected, and finally shook his head.

"Not altogether, Roger," he said. "There's something in what you say. And if the fellow had told the garrison disheartening lies, I'd understand your anger. But hope's none too plenty now, Heaven knows. And for you to dash the men's spirits because they had drunk in a bit too much of hope——"

Sir Roger darted a quick, watching look at Petre, paused, and then at last he spoke out.

"Hope," he said sombrely, "may be harder to handle than despair. Given certain conditions—given that it were found necessary—to consider any correspondence—any opening of truce—nay, more, of treaty—of surrender, in fine, to the enemy."

It was said. He ended. No sound broke

the silence that followed but the drop of some wood-ashes from the fire to the hearth.

To his dying day old Petre, sitting to warm his old toes by a wood fire, never heard again that little sound, but he felt again the stifling silence—the hardest five minutes of a hard life—in which his oldest friendship died.

When his slow faculties became aware of themselves, Francis Petre was staring before him at the Naseby sword which hung upon the wall. He averted his eyes from it with a shock of shame, as one might who had brought a sacred thing into an evil presence; and that movement gave back to him his power of movement. He got up, with some difficulty but steadily, and stood looking into the eyes of the stranger who had been his friend.

"Sir Roger Arden," he said, "if any servant of his Majesty considers, under present conditions, any correspondence with the enemy"—he stopped with labouring breath, and resumed firmly—"it is my task henceforward to make the hopes of this garrison too strong for any such person's handling."

The man who had been his friend looked back at him with those stranger's eyes. Colonel Petre went out.

The hall was quiet now, but smaller, closer, somehow.

Sir Roger got up and opened a casement.

"It's well," he said to himself, "I should know where I stand with Petre."

He closed the casement, sat down, and pulled out Calthorpe's letter.

CHAPTER X

SIR GILES CALTHORPE had so worded his letter that if, by any mishap, it should fall into the enemy's hands, it should betray no secrets.

It ran as follows: "I send you a messenger who will put heart into your garrison. What he tells them will be truth by the time they hear it. How long can you hold out?"

Sir Roger sat and conned over these words. Clearly, the story that John Stubbs had told, that Calthorpe had defeated Hales and was in full march to relieve Thirlby—clearly this story was what Calthorpe had hoped, had expected, at the time he despatched the letter—not what he had achieved.

"Therefore"—so persisted Sir Roger to himself—"the man's story of Calthorpe's victory may be truth by now, or it may *not*." He was strangely eager with himself to prove this point: to assert that he himself had not lied in telling Petre that Stubbs had lied. When he had satisfied himself that it could never be said of him that he had lied to Petre, he turned his attention to the next step in his devious path. This was to find out how much truth there might actually be in the story he had pronounced to be a

lie. He sent for John Stubbs, and cross-examined him, and soon made sure that Stubbs had at least told his story in good faith.

No, Stubbs did not come himself direct from Calthorpe. He had the letter and the news from his father. His father had brought him letter and news, and good money to pay him for the risk of finding his way into Thirlby. His father had then returned to Calthorpe. And anything that the father, Thomas Stubbs, had said, the son, John Stubbs, would swear to.

Here Sir Roger found it best to dismiss this part of the subject, saying aloud, as he had said to himself: "This story of thine, John Stubbs, may be true or it may not."

Then he took out a small, thin, folded paper, and gave it into the countryman's hands.

"This," he said, "you will carry to Sir Giles Calthorpe, and will give into his hands only. But if you should be taken with it upon you, you will chew it up and swallow it, and then you will give Sir Giles, instead of it, this message by word of mouth: 'Sir Roger Arden is not able to tell how long Thirlby House may yet hold out.' Have you got that?"

And he made Stubbs go over it very carefully till it was sure.

"And now, mark me, John Stubbs," Sir Roger said at last, before dismissing him, "any

messenger henceforth who lets even the outside of his message be seen among the garrison, or who breathes a sound of whence he comes, or why, or who spreads news, false or true, by word of mouth—any such foolish messenger will hang within two hours. And now, John Stubbs"—Sir Roger concluded with less severity, for he saw the fellow's mouth fall open with fear—"that thou mayst see that it is worth an honest man's while to deal honestly with me—here's five gold pieces to pay thee in advance for the errand I send thee on."

John Stubbs trudged off then, all agape between wonder, fear, and satisfaction, and Sir Roger Arden twitched his chair round with its back to Petre's empty chair, and sat looking into the fire.

Since the day that the cup of Sir Roger Arden's confident happiness had been dashed from him, in the loss of wife and heir, there had grown up in that empty heart a fiercer tenacity of purpose, a hungrier determination to have at last, somehow, his will. Alongside of the Sir Roger Arden who fought those six years openly and gallantly for his king, there lived a Sir Roger Arden fighting secretly and desperately for himself—fighting to be able to say at last, somehow, that he was master. At what time this fierce self-will gripped its roots about one point Sir Roger Arden himself could

not have said. But it came to be his one object in life that Thirlby—fate notwithstanding—should remain in the possession of his own line. The marriage which Dick Arden now desired with his daughter had been intended by Sir Roger long before. When Dick's wish fell in with his intention he marked it coolly as a point in the game secured. Nor did the thought of opposition from his adoring daughter so much as cross his mind.

Of late, however, he did see his will threatened, nay, most desperately imperilled, but from a different quarter—from the tide of war, which set so strong against all Royalists when Cromwell's New Model re-made the rebel army. Small use to ally his daughter to the heir of Thirlby if Thirlby were sequestrated from that heir and given to some friend of Cromwell. Thus the open and secret loyalties were brought into direct conflict. And, the full and final possession of Thirlby, its transmission to his own heir, having become the idol of Sir Roger's stubborn will—before this self-made god the older loyalty gave way. For this alone he had thought and schemed, and had become far-seeing. And seeing (or so he thought) that inevitable disaster gathered about King Charles—why then, he asked himself, since no effort could save the King, why should not a man save Thirlby? As a man might save it, doubt-

less, to his line, by a timely, a reasonable composition with General Cromwell.

This train of thought had grown to be so clear and so familiar to Sir Roger that it was only strange that he had found it hard to put it before old Francis Petre. Poor Francis Petre, however, had justified that hesitation, and had shown himself to be as headlong and rash as any of the youngsters. What Sir Roger did, he now saw that he must do without counsel with any. That was clear—nay, without their knowledge. Aye, and quickly, too. Since he could hardly enforce it against their open mutiny. Well, there were ways.

His head sunk low upon his breast.

He was so deep in thought he did not see his daughter Millicent come in, and she, not daring to disturb his thought, or his sleep, she knew not which, sat down upon a low stool and waited.

The troubled passion in which she had left the Long Gallery had wept itself out long ago; and in its place was a weary bewilderment.

Millicent had always been so sure of everything. "Everything" was everything that concerned an Arden. And everything that concerned an Arden was to do always what was right in an Arden's eyes. And now the man whom an Arden loved had, in failing to vindicate his honour, done what was right in his

own eyes, not in hers. And the only hope left for him was that perhaps she herself had been mistaken in the Arden code. Perhaps her father would declare Ned Falconer in the right. Then she could go on loving him. For as to loving a man who might be as much in the wrong as herself—how could that cross the mind of a maiden who had never been in the wrong — except in poor Aunt Ursula's eyes ?

Here sat Millicent, then, and waited till her father stirred, when she asked in a timid voice :

" Are you sleeping, father ? "

Sir Roger sat up with a start.

His daughter was sitting on the other side of the hearth, and was looking up at him in a pleading way that was new in her. It came to him as he looked across at her that the girl was growing to a woman, and—quite suddenly—that he had not yet given nephew Dick his answer. General Cromwell had, in fact, for these four days kept their heads and hands engaged with different matters. But to-day there was a breathing-space. And to-day this matter of the marriage could be adjusted. All this in the time it took Sir Roger to look across at his daughter and to say :—

" No, little maid ; I am not sleeping."

" There is something I would ask you, father," the girl said, " if I may."

"Why, surely, child." And he held out his hand for hers.

It was not often that Sir Roger had time to observe this child of his, for whom, or through whom, he planned unceasingly. Observing her to-night, he saw that at last the child was getting a look of her mother. And as he saw it a spring, long buried and sealed but never dried, stirred in his dusty heart. He held her before him at the length of his arm when she drew near and took his hand, moving to him with a new timidity, with the gentleness which had clothed Alice Arden as with a garment, but which he had never seen in Millicent till now. Sir Roger had often looked at his child with pride, but never before with so much tenderness.

"Ask what you will, child"—and then he broke off, with a sudden haste to tell her of her great destiny—of the marriage which was the foundation and the keystone of his scheme.

"Ask what you will," he said quickly; "but first I'll ask you something."

He stood up and took her chin in his hand, and smiling down at her, questioned her proudly.

"Do you love Thirlby, little maid?"

"Do *I love it!*" was all her answer.

"Since you love Thirlby, then, are you happy now—when I tell you—what I have to tell you?"

He paused, then spoke weightily:

"Thirlby, my child, will be always yours."

"Mine? Thirlby?" Millicent looked at him, puzzled. "How can that be? Thirlby will be Dick's."

"Thirlby will be Dick's, and thine, too. Thine and Dick's. How can *that* be? Think, and tell me how?"

He smiled down at her still, while she still looked back at him, seeking his meaning. Till a sudden colour ran over her face, and he saw that she understood. Then, for he would not spy upon her heart, he turned and moved away.

"There, child," he said shortly. "It's Dick will tell thee the rest. I'll send him."

And he went towards the door.

But she ran to him quickly, and overtook him, and catching at his arm with both hands, "Oh, no, father!" she panted. "Oh, no, no, no!"

"*No!*" Shouting the word, Sir Roger turned upon his child with a sudden anger, which was a sudden fear. But when he saw her white and panting look, a sudden pity rose across his path.

What was this? Something withstanding his life's purpose? Something unforeseen? Something that he could not hurt?

He tried to laugh at it. It was so weak, this new hindrance, yet so strong.

"Why, why," he said. "You're not afraid of Dick Arden?"

She laughed, too, a sobbing laugh, at her old playfellow's name. "Afraid of dear Dick? *No!* Afraid of *you*, father."

He stared at her. She was trembling and clinging and holding his right arm.

"Afraid," she sobbed, "but, no, father—*no, no, no*—you *will* not make me marry Dick!"

He was staring at her still. It was he who was afraid. For he knew now that he would not make her.

While they stood thus, while the whole fabric of his scheme rocked under him at the cry of his only child, a quick step ran down the passage, and a quick knock sounded on the door.

CHAPTER XI

WITH a gasp of relief at the call from inward to external conflict Sir Roger tore his arm from Millicent.

"Open," he cried.

Ned Falconer sprang in—hot, disordered, out of breath.

"Cromwell—" he cried, "Cromwell has planted their mortar-piece—the South Hill."

"The South Hill. You're mad," shouted Sir Roger. "The South Hill's not possible."

"It's done," said Ned.

He reeled. Sir Roger thrust him down into a chair, and with what breath was left him Ned panted out his news.

Dr. Bertram's glass on the tower commanded the rebel lines save for two spots. To one of these Dick had despatched Cornwallis and his men. Any attack from the other and nearer spot, from the steep scarp of the South Hill, had been pronounced impossible, not only by Sir Roger, but by the engineers of General Hales. But to this spot Ned Falconer, ignorant of possibilities, but surmising something of Cromwell—to this spot he had presumed to make his way alone, across the open—had gained the

cover of the little wood, which hid from the tower the precipitous face of the South Hill, and there he, who had guessed what Cromwell might do with the impossible, had seen what he had done.

How he had done it—how the huge, cumbrous mortar-piece had been lugged round during last night from the remote east battery to the near South Hill—how four preceding nights of ceaseless toil, following on four days of ceaseless fight, had dug up, and cast up, and founded, and shored up, a foothold on that crag for the monster gun—all this Ned did not know, nor could any in the rebel camp have told him. All that was known to Cromwell's men was that the Worshipful Council of State delayed sending them light and serviceable guns, wherefore it remained for them to find means to use such unwieldy pieces as they had.

And all that Ned waited to see was that the mortar-piece was placed, and so placed as to be able to drop upon the house stones, chain, or grenadoes, and that as soon as ever the masking timber should be cleared away.

What a quarter-hour followed on this momentous news for one unnoticed listener!

Millicent, drawn back in a dark corner, saw Colonel Petre, Dick Arden, Lovel, all the seniors called to council, saw them crowding

in eager consultation, saw them hanging on the news won by the daring of the man she loved. Did he see her, drawn back in her dark corner? Did he know how her heart beat for pride in him? So she asked herself, not knowing that there are times when a man sees nothing, knows nothing, but his work among his fellow-men.

The others came and went, consulted, took and gave orders, and gave place to others yet, as the plan of the great sortie which was to write the proudest page in Thirlby's history took shape in Sir Roger Arden's brain.

But always in the central group was Ned Falconer, ready at Sir Roger's elbow, with the crisp word that told what the clear eye had noted and the steady mind had registered. And always in the dark corner behind the chimney sat Millicent.

How quickly they passed, those minutes—the last perfectly proud minutes of her life. Cornwallis and Lovel were gone—to prepare for four o'clock next morning. Now Petre went, too. (Old Petre! his simple old heart lifted up with joy to think he had dreamed a bad dream of Roger, for see how Roger was fighting now!) And now the newcomers also went to their posts, and only three men were left—Sir Roger Arden, Dick, and Ned Falconer.

And what was this sudden angry talk? Ned Falconer and Dick urging some request upon her father which her father would not grant. And Ned urged it again with passion, and Dick joined in hotly, too; and Sir Roger, replying to them with soothing tones, laid a kindly hand upon Ned's shoulder. But Ned drew himself proudly away from Sir Roger's hand. And as Millicent rose, confused, alarmed, her father's words reached her ears—such words!

"I refuse because I think that you are—not a soldier."

And her father's meaning shone out to her mind in a blaze of shame as quick as Ned Falconer's quick and clear reply:—

"Because, sir, you think that I am a coward."

On that word there followed such a stillness where the three men sat—Sir Roger continuing to look upon Ned with a not unkindly, deliberating look—such was the stillness there that all three men heard a faint rustling sound in the dark.

"Listeners!" Sir Roger turned fiercely, his hand upon his sword. Then he cried: "Millicent, you here!"

Yes. That dreadful moment that told Millicent that her presence was unknown to the speakers—that made her wish it for

ever unknown — that moment, with its unconscious movement of horror, had made her known.

And Ned Falconer's cup of bitterness was full.

"It is I," she said faintly.

She stood up, looking this way and that for escape—looking anywhere, rather than at the man who was burning under such an insult —looking finally at Dick.

She did not know she was looking at Dick. But Dick knew it, and, slow of wit as he was, he knew why.

He got up and nodded to her.

"Cousin Millicent!" he said. "That's well. For now you'll join with me. And mine uncle must hear all the three of us, and must give Ned here his chance to show he's——"

"Hush!" gasped the girl.

"To show *he is a soldier,*" finished Dick steadily.

"Come, uncle!" He faced Sir Roger with Millicent's hand on his arm.

Sir Roger looked from the pair to Ned, and back again to them. He had meant in all kindness to hold back his wife's kinsman from a folly—so convinced was he that mild Edward Falconer's studious son would fail in face of a fight.

But at this moment it concerned him more

nearly to gratify his heir and his daughter, thus happily linked in a request.

"Have it your own way," he said impatiently, and, turning, he stooped over the plan that lay on the table.

Ned Falconer's brain spun with hope! Was his chance to be given him at last—and in the presence of his love?

Sir Roger beckoned him. "Ned Falconer, you will bring up twelve men of the reserve *here*, from the sally gate, to second Dick Arden at the brook."

Ned bowed, speechless, choked with joy. Before he found his tongue, Dick, at a signal from Sir Roger, had taken Millicent away. She was gone without a word, without a look. The door was shut on them. He was alone with his great kinsman, with his captain.

Sir Roger stood staring hard at him, tugging at his beard, then came to him and again laid a hand upon his shoulder.

This time Ned Falconer did not shake off the hand. He looked up gladly, eagerly.

What was this sombre gaze he met?

"You would have it," said Sir Roger, "but you're not a soldier, and you've never seen a fight. I was your friend."

Ned Falconer did not shake off the hand. He stood under it. Its weight became one with

the old leaden weight of the old doubt. Presently he heard steps. A door shut. He moved. The hand was gone; the doubt remained.

It was eight o'clock next morning. The sortie had begun before daybreak, according to the plan made overnight.

Sir Roger, with colours, in the Great Tower, gave signals when to march, and when to retreat. Lovel had the main guard, to secure a retreat at the southern gate. Cornwallis had charge of the sally gate to secure a retreat on the east side. Jessop was in command of the marksmen and musketeers upon the walls—to attend the advance, or to vex the flight, of the enemy. Robert Gamage (trained and promoted by Dick Arden from horse-boy to right-hand man) stood, with a reserve of fresh men, ready at the parade, to relieve either captain in case of necessity. And of these reserve men, the twelve commanded by Ned Falconer were to be the first to sally forth from the east sally gate, to reinforce Dick Arden at the brook whensoever Dick should enter upon the second part of his task.

Dick Arden's task was, first to fight under Petre in the opening assault on the enemy's east battery; and next (that position once carried and held by Colonel Petre) to beat up

the enemy's trenches towards that south point from which Dick must then dislodge the mortar-piece.

All being thus disposed, Colonel Petre having with him Dick Arden, Mainwaring, and eighty men, had issued secretly out of the east gate at four o'clock—so as to be up to the lines of the enemy before the peep of dawn.

And Millicent, ensconced in a south-east angle of the wall, promised her proud, breathless self to know all that should pass, and, in particular, all the deeds of those twelve men who to-day had Ned Falconer for their leader.

But at the first light of dawn, while all on the walls strained their eyes towards the east battery, the mortar-piece on the South Hill vomited its first grenado. And this, dropping on the Long Gallery and exploding there, the old carved wood and painted canvases of that Gallery were instantly all in a light flame. And for three hours after it needed the uttermost strength of all: of the women and Dr. Bertram, of old Stocker and of such men as Jessop could lend from the walls, to keep the flames from spreading to the destruction of the whole house.

By eight the flames were brought under, and now the smoke-grimed workers stood and found

their breath in a ring round Mistress Ursula, whose blistered hands Millicent was binding up. But old Stocker did not stay to look, nor yet to find his breath, but stumped off to the walls, bent not on news only, but also upon speaking out his mind to young Robert Gamage, who had neither come himself, nor sent him men to help fight down the fire.

Nor was Millicent many moments behind the steward. Her task of surgery was swiftly done, and then she gave her aunt to Joan's care, and flew across the courtyard to her chosen post of observation.

It was in the courtyard, empty of Gamage and his men, that the first word reached her.

Jessop spoke it to old Stocker.

"They ran," said Jessop.

Millicent stopped short, white with indignation. "Who ran?" she cried. "Gamage's fellows?"

Jessop looked at her.

"No, no," he said, and quickly walked away.

"Who ran?" repeated Millicent to old Stocker, who shook his old head.

"What matter?" he said evasively. "All's well none the less. The enemy are beaten back. Master Dick hath the mortar-piece. Robert Gamage was out with his men in time to cover —to cover—well, well. Trust Sir Roger to

cover every risk. Here they come! Captain Mainwaring defends their passage now while they drag the great gun in."

"*Who ran?*" said Millicent; but Stocker was gone, joining himself to knots of men coming in now at the south gate: many maimed, bleeding, and staggering, some supported—some carried outright—by their comrades, but all alight with victory and laughter.

Millicent's head swam. She was giddy. Why? The fire? But the fire was over, and the fire had not harmed her. She would find someone—her father, yes, her father.

So she turned. And, turning, she faced a man who was coming towards her from the east gate.

It was Ned Falconer. He carried his sheathed sword in his hand. He was walking quickly and did not look up. Even when she called his name he did not look up.

"Who ran?" she cried, shrilly now, and herself ran towards him to catch him by the arm. He must see her—though he gave no sign of seeing or of hearing—for he moved aside lest she should touch him.

Oh, if he would speak! If he would explain, appeal, tell her anything—*anything!*

But the only thought he had of her then was that she must not touch him.

He was looking at something now as he

walked forward with that quick, even pace. She followed his eyes. He was looking at her father, who was meeting Dick Arden at the great gate.

He was looking at her father. He was walking towards her father. And the other men as he came drew away, looking aside at those three, and talking together.

Then Millicent saw Ned Falconer give up that sheathed sword into her father's hands—and she knew who had run. And, reeling, she caught at her one support.

She was an Arden.

" Father ! " said Millicent.

Sir Roger turned sharply. " We don't want women here," was his thought.

But his daughter Millicent, flushed, brilliant, with glittering eyes, came quickly to his side.

" You asked my hand," she said, " for Dick Arden. *Give it to him*, father. Give my hand to the King's brave soldier."

Sir Roger's face lit up. Victory ! Victory every way. Victory even over that shadowy fear of his own weakness against his own child.

" Well thought of, Millicent," he cried. " Here's a fit crown for a victor ! "

He placed that quivering hand on Dick's. It was a wonder to see Dick Arden's face. He was so pleased, so puzzled, so honestly abashed at

this to-do before fifty witnesses. He took the hand shyly, pressed it—remembered that he should have kissed it. The courtyard swarmed with more and more men, crowding, questioning—cheering presently.

Ned Falconer was forgotten by all.

By all but one.

CHAPTER XII

MISTRESS URSULA TUDDENHAM lay in her bedchamber meanwhile. She lay stretched on her back, her bandaged arms straight along the coverlet by her sides. She lay still, save for a queer grimace of pain now and then, and, pain or no pain, she lay silent. Little Joan Arden, who had helped her to her bed, sat now by the foot of it, silent also. The morning sun shone in on the quiet place, bringing, after the night of turmoil, a hope—a freshness of new day—which was as calming to the two tired workers as sleep itself could be. For Joan, however, the calm was fading softly into sleep, when there sprang up from the court below such a sudden clamour and shout of joy as shook the blind girl broad awake, with every sensitive pulse throbbing and hammering to those hammering shocks of sound, and brought Ursula out of her bed and some way towards the window before the baffling giddiness seized her again, and sent her tottering back.

Again and again the shout rose.

"What is it, Joan?" cried Ursula, with impatience. "Never mind me, child," as Joan's

deft hands were settling the bed-clothes about her. "Why do they cheer so? Have they taken that wicked gun? Look out. Nay; lean out, child, lean!"

"I may lean far enough, before I *see* anything," said little bitter Joan.

"But can you not hear what they are shouting?" persisted Ursula. She was so curious to know the news that she did not pause to reprove Joan's disrespect. Or, perhaps, the sickening pain which took all her strength to master it, made her indulgent to Joan's sore spirit.

As Joan drew back her head from the window, a rush of proud tears astonished her eyes.

"They are shouting for Dick," she said. "They shout 'Dick Arden! Arden! Dick Arden!'"

She laughed at her own tears—to find herself so fond and foolish; and there was a new happiness in the laugh and in the tears. How they shouted! And Dick was her own brother. Her own!

She wiped her eyes, and leaned out again to hear more. But this time she drew back with an angry frown.

"What now?" asked Ursula.

Joan was silent. She did not lean out again but sat down where the foot of the great bed hid her from Ursula's sight.

"Can you make out nothing more?" urged the sick woman. "What is it? What do they say? Why do they shout for Dick? Has he brought in that wicked gun? That's what I would know."

In the past seventeen weeks Mistress Ursula had learned a dogged acceptance of the ordinary chances of war, but she did not include among such this evil device, which had thrown fire into a well-kept house, and had disabled the housewife.

Still there was no reply from Joan. Ursula raised herself slowly, with a shudder of pain, till she could see the girl over the bed's foot. Joan was sat down on the window-seat, her back to the window, her shoulders hunched up to her ears, her face set stubbornly. Ursula knew this mood of Joan's, though she could not guess what brought it now. She had fought it often, but had never broken it. She sank back, and the pain of that movement again preached patience, as pain does to some whom only over busy-ness made harsh.

"Go and rest, Joan, for a while," she said. "A kind little maid you have been to me this day."

Joan hesitated, struck hard by the softened voice, but rose at last to go.

"You may bid my niece, Millicent, come speak with me," said Ursula.

At that Joan stood still by the bedside. "They were shouting for *her*," she said.

"For her?" Mistress Ursula stared at the girl, who stood frowning and twisting her hands hard together.

"For Millicent," she said. "They were shouting, 'Dick Arden and Mistress Millicent! Ardens! Ardens!'"

Mistress Ursula raised herself right up this time, regardless of any pain. "What has Millicent to do with Dick?" she said, and her voice was full of misgiving.

"Nothing!" said Joan fiercely. "Dick is *my* brother. Mine! What has Millicent to do with him?"

But here Ursula thought well to be more clear with the angry child. Joan was little more than a child, she thought, just turned sixteen, and with all a jealous child's petulance.

"Dick is thy brother, Joan," said Ursula, gravely; "but Dick will be many things more besides that."

"You mean he will want to marry Millicent," answered Joan, quickly—violently. "I know that. But he cannot, for she——" Some new-born instinct of loyalty stopped her speech. Mistress Ursula looked at her. She herself had guessed enough of Millicent's feeling for Ned Falconer to be sure that she would not marry Dick. She wondered how much Joan

knew of it. But she crushed her own burning curiosity to learn more, and said firmly: "You may leave me, Joan." And Joan obeyed without another word.

So Mistress Ursula lay alone in that tumult of mind that rages when activity is struck helpless.

What mischief was doing below there, now that she was out of the way? And next (since she was one who dealt honestly with herself) she was asking herself, what mischief had she prevented when she was in the way? What confidence of her dead sister's child had she won? And why had she not won any? She had meant well. She had started well. Why had she not won the motherless child? The answer had been clear enough, and good enough while she was about and busy. She had "no patience with Millicent's proud fantastic ways." The answer was clear still. She had "had no patience."

Clear still—but no longer good. For as she lay there—with hot waves of pain surging up over her, falling back into cold weakness, and rising once again—as she lay there, Ursula's six years' housewifery in Alice Arden's place were passing, it seemed, not now before her own satisfied gaze, but before the seeking, questioning eyes of sweet Alice Arden. And Alice looked at each trophy of order, of management,

of industry, with the eager, quick approving which Ursula remembered in her; but looked hurriedly, frightenedly, looking past each for something else, for something different, for something incomparably more dear. And Ursula saw the frightened question growing in Alice's wide anxious eyes, and saw it forming on Alice's trembling white lips, and tried to stop it, but could not stop it. And heard it burst forth in Alice's cry: "Where is *Millicent?*"

It was Ursula herself who had cried out. The sound of the opening door had brought her out of her troubled dream with that cry. When she knew her own voice, she had the relief of sudden tears, and turned her head thankfully towards the door, hoping to see her question answered—her bad dream finally dispelled.

But it was not Millicent who entered. It was Joan—Joan with a strange, changed face—a face in which anger, mockery, and triumphant disdain fought and mingled; and all were charged with a secret joy.

"Millicent will not come," said Joan. Then she started violently. For in her darkness she felt herself clutched tightly and held, by a bandaged hand, and she knew at the price of what agony she was so held.

"What has happened to Millicent?" Ursula's voice came harsh and commanding, but

the grip of her wounded hand had a command stronger still.

"I'll tell you. I'll tell you," moaned Joan, moaning for the other's pain. "Only, do not hold me with that poor hand."

She dropped on her knees beside the bed. The hand relaxed. Joan lifted the poor hurt thing softly back to its place, and knelt there, sick with sympathy, till she could find breath to speak.

"What has happened to Millicent?" came again from the bed. Joan had found her breath now. She could laugh, even.

"All that is proud and glorious has happened to Millicent," she said. "My brother Dick hath taken the gun, and is come in full of victory and honour. And so my cousin Millicent hath bestowed upon him the crowning honour of her hand."

There was a low groan of dismay from the bed, but Joan did not hear, or did not heed it. She went on relentlessly: "So all the whole garrison is shouting for joy. Except nine of Colonel Petre's men, and four of Lovel's, that lie dead before the East Battery, or on the hill, and three that are dying. And Ned Falconer," her voice rose clear with what seemed fond defiance, "that is—*disgraced*."

There was a long silence. The sick woman was labouring her weakened brain, trying to

piece together Joan's story in some shape that should explain Millicent's strange act. At last she said, faintly:

"Ned Falconer disgraced? How? By some lie?"

"By the truth," said Joan shortly. Then she began again, in a low fierce murmur. "I'll tell you how. They have kept him from fighting, and told him he could not fight, till they have made him believe it. They have made him fear himself. And to-day, when they let him fight, what does mine uncle do to help him? Does he send him forth with a good word? Does he say, 'This corner of the fight I trust to you'? Not he. He lets him know he is distrusted. He is careful to let him know that Gamage, the horse-boy, who has been taught more fighting than he, stands ready to reinforce him, or to replace him, should he fail. So he starts forth, and starts too early, and waits under fire for Dick's advance; and his men distrust him too, and wonder why he waits, and he sees them look at each other and whisper while they wait, and he thinks, 'They don't trust me. They won't follow me. And if they do not follow me, the point is lost.' And this fear of their fear grows on him, till at last he gives the signal for Gamage to come up. And his men see him signal, just when the enemy moves. And they think he is

afraid, and *they* are afraid. And they run. And *he* runs. He *ran!*"

Joan finished with again that strong defiance.

"Ned Falconer ran?" Ursula spoke very sadly, thinking not so much now of the kind lad who had won her heart, as of poor proud Millicent whose heart she herself had never won.

"He ran," repeated Joan. "And when my cousin Millicent knew that, she was *ashamed* of him; she turned her back on him, there in the court, before them all. She chose *that* time to bestow her hand on Dick."

At the bitter contempt of the girl's voice, with its undernote of joy, a new suspicion woke in Ursula. She turned her eyes on the girl crouched beside her. The little blind white face was alight with a brooding triumph.

"Who told you what your cousin Millicent had done?" she questioned, sharply. "Had you speech with her?"

"No," said Joan. "She is locked into her room."

"Then who told you of her?"

"Christopher Stocker," answered Joan, and hung her head.

"You questioned her servant about your cousin?" asked Ursula.

Joan was silent, much ashamed.

"And about Ned Falconer, too?" pursued Ursula.

"About *him?* No!" flashed Joan.

"Then how do you know the causes that brought him to turn his back on the enemy?"

Joan did not answer for a moment. She moved slightly. Ursula could no longer see her face.

Then she said in an uncertain voice: "I—I guessed." And presently, with certainty, lifting her head: "I know."

Ursula sighed.

Here was little Joan grown a woman on her hands—just when she knew that she had failed with her other charge. It was well she had time to think. For she had more matter for thought this idle day than in all the six busy years of her rule in Thirlby House.

CHAPTER XIII

"UNCLE," said Joan Arden, softly. "Are you alone?"

She stood at the door of Sir Roger's bedchamber. She had knocked twice, and getting no answer, had dared at last to turn the handle of the door.

Small wonder that Sir Roger did not hear her knock; for besides the noise from the wall —the tramp of men, the words of command, and the shots exchanged at intervals (and all these came very clearly through the open window of his tower-room), there was something of a hubbub from within the house, a movement and noise which reached its height indeed in the great hall, but which came up the small winding-stair too, so far as this, the lowest door in the Great Tower.

The eight days that had passed since the great sortie had been kept very well filled by General Cromwell. He had lost the most formidable of his great guns, and he had not received his smaller ones. But while he waited for these he saw to it that the men under his command were better employed than in eating out their hearts, and every

day he gave some new annoyance to the garrison.

Still he was no nearer to getting in. And Sir Roger to-day was so secure, so sure that he could hold Thirlby till he pleased to surrender it on his own terms, that he had given orders for the great banquet to take place, which had been postponed from day to day these eight days past, and which must fitly celebrate the betrothal of his daughter with his heir.

It was the preparation for this feast which was making the interior of Thirlby House this morning more noisy and far less orderly than her beleaguered walls, and which drowned Joan Arden's knocking on her uncle's door.

"Are you *quite* alone, uncle?" whispered Joan, just within the door now. "For only so I can give my message."

Sir Roger did not answer at once. He was deep in calculation. He was wondering whether he had best make overtures to Cromwell without any more delay, or wait till a nearer prospect of relief from Sir Giles Calthorpe should increase the value of this offer. To be sure, relief once near and certain might come too quick for Sir Roger's plans——

He looked up at last with impatience, but seeing only little Joan, answered her with the

contemptuous kindness which was one of her most galling injuries.

" Yes, yes, I am alone. What is the mighty mystery ? "

She smiled a little smile, and closed the door behind her.

" This, uncle," she said. " There is a man asking for you at the Outer Gatehouse. The guard there, under Ned Falconer, refused to let him in. They demanded his message. But he said that he had been sworn that no eye but yours should look upon it—"

She heard the startled movement that brought Sir Roger to his feet at her words, and she smiled again, and waited. She let him come to the door where she was standing, sweep her out of his way with one hand, and reach the threshold, before she ended demurely :

" —*I* have his message, uncle."

" You ! "

Sir Roger turned, his foot already on the stair. She did not go to meet him. It was for him now to come to her.

She spoke on quietly while he came.

" Ned Falconer would not let the messenger come in to you," she said, " lest he should be a spy. But since the man was obstinate to his oath, that no eyes must see the letter, Ned Falconer sent and entreated me that I

should be their messenger. And the fellow, seeing that I was blind, was content to trust me, and so——"

"Give me the letter," broke in Sir Roger, standing before her now, towering over her.

"Here it is," said Joan, putting her hand through her pocket-hole, and feeling in the great pocket that hung below her gown.

With no further thought than to please her own importance, to prolong the time in which great strong Uncle Roger stood waiting his young niece's pleasure—with no more far-seeing thought than this — Joan lingered on the packet when she found it, fingering it lightly before she brought it out, and speaking slowly—half-mischievous, half-curious:

"So little a letter it is for this great to-do. A little letter, with a seal—with a seal like—a sword—within a circle—or a crown."

But at that her uncle's hand closed quick and firm upon her wrist, the letter was drawn forth, taken from her, the door was opened. "Go, Joan," she heard, in the voice she had never dared to disobey. And she found herself outside on the stair, and the door shut against her. And there she crouched in the shadow: no longer a woman learning, she knew not how, such things as a loving sympathy might teach her; but a petty, angry

child, bent on finding out, because she was forbid to know.

Inside the room, Sir Roger Arden had unfolded Calthorpe's despatch, and stood looking at its single line: "Hold out. In two days at the latest I am up with you. Giles Calthorpe. His seal."

To which followed the great red seal of the Wreathed Dagger and no more.

How long he stood, he did not know; nor why he stood at all: for in his own mind the matter had been long decided, and now there was no time to lose. But shadows came before him—only shadows—old Frank Petre the clearest of them. The blind girl, crouched outside his door, heard him laugh once, and was frightened, she knew not why. That was when he found himself stopping to look at Francis Petre's shadow. Old Frank Petre! The most notorious dunce of all the Royalist faction (it was a faction now, in Sir Roger's thoughts). That he should shiver and run from Frank's shadow like any child in the dark! He who walked in daylight, tracking out and weighing the causes and the course of matters wherein such blockheads stumble and trip!

It was over. He was awake—the shadows gone. A brain like his, dealing with mutinous madmen, must needs enforce by stratagem

the reasoning which they would master by brute force. It must be speedy. It must be secret. Yes: a door secretly opened: it must be thus.

He sat down at a table and drew the inkhorn near him. His brain worked swiftly now. He saw each step that lay before him.

First, Calthorpe's letter itself must go to Cromwell, to prove the service done him by the surrender of Thirlby within view of near relief. Then, some brief word, to sound the rebel General. At the foot of Calthorpe's letter Sir Roger wrote:

"If General Cromwell will have the house of Thirlby secretly delivered into his hands this night, let him send his warrant for the lives of all the garrison, and for the continuing of the estate of Thirlby to the Arden family."

Next, who should be the bearer of this message to Cromwell? Who so fit as Ned Falconer? For Sir Roger had given Ned back his surrendered sword, bidding him take for sufficient punishment the taunts or cold looks of his comrades; and, seeing the gleam of gratitude that had passed then across that darkened brow, he had told himself that here was now a devoted follower ready to his hand.

Yet he would not trust the most devoted

an inch farther than he could help. Even Ned had best not know to whom his errand ran till he was well outside the walls.

Sir Roger folded Calthorpe's letter, therefore, with the treasonous postscript he had added, and having written on the outer side of it :—" To General Cromwell. With Haste and Silence. These," he looked about him for an outer wrapper—a blank cover, in which to enclose the whole, and so to hide the hated name of Cromwell even from Ned Falconer.

While he looked, there was a tap at the fast-bolted door, and Joan's voice called :—

" I have a new message, uncle, about the messenger."

Sir Roger would have opened for no other reason, nor for any reason would he have opened except to the blind girl. And before opening even to her, he buttoned the despatch safe across his breast, under his coat. Then he unbolted the door, and rebolting it the moment she was within, asked impatiently : " What of the messenger ? "

" He is gone," said Joan. " He was afraid, they said, and he escaped away, just after he had given me the letter."

" Good ! " said Sir Roger, and thought how good all was for him. For now, who of the

Royalist faction could know that Calthorpe's promise had ever reached him? And as he thought thus, the tower walls shook to the clanging bell that called the King's servants to the betrothal feast of Millicent.

CHAPTER XIV

"SIR ROGER! Hurrah! Sir Roger!"

Never in all its history had the old hall of Thirlby House made such a gallant show.

What though carved silver sconces no longer hung upon its walls, and the meat and drink of this day's feast must be served in earthen bowls and pots of pewter? On the walls hung the same tattered banners and the same rows of dingy portraits, and never before had portraits and banners looked down on two such rows of guests.

As the vessels of silver and of gold that once had decked that board had flowed in one molten stream of service for the King, so the lean, haggard men who sat beside it to-day were fused in one flame of loyalty; and adorned, besides, every man of them, in this moment snatched from the death-struggle, with a blithe carriage and with glints of courtliness—long disused—wherewith to grace the day of Dick's betrothal.

Every man of them. Yes: even Mr. Plenipotentiary Falconer, who, since his disgrace, had moved among his contemptuous fellows a

silent, baffling shadow, even Ned Falconer appeared this morning of a sudden in his best, and at his gayest.

Topping the right-hand row of men, Dick Arden sat, as was fit, with Millicent's brave old godfather, Francis Petre, facing him.

And between them, heading the board of the King's servants, sat Sir Roger Arden, with a paper buttoned close across his breast.

It was when Sir Roger rose to his feet that the shouts broke out: "Sir Roger! Sir Roger! We'll pledge Sir Roger to start with. Hurrah!"

His voice was drowned, till at last, "A murrain on you," he cried, "for a crew of unmannerly boys," and he brought his fist down on the table. "Silence, I say. What? Am I master at my own table?"

Lovel, already warmed with wine, got to his feet, and with great severity: "Hear Sir Roger," he said, and was kindly put back in his place by his neighbours.

With a general murmur of "Hear Sir Roger," the hubbub fell to silence.

"I say," said Sir Roger, "that you shall not pledge me to-day. To-day, at this table, there shall be one health drunk, and one only."

All sprang to their feet with a shout, "The King! God bless him!"

Dr. Bertram bared his head, and the women who were serving the feast (Joan and Bridget, directed by Mistress Ursula), dropped down upon their knees.

With a cheer, all drained their glasses. Sir Roger lifted his and set it down untasted.

As they sat again, Dr. Bertram turned smiling to him: "But I marvel at you, sir," he said, "that, at this feast of her betrothal, you will not have us pledge sweet Mistress Millicent, your dear and only child."

"Faith, yes, that's churlish, good uncle," said Dick. "Come, give us my dear cousin Millicent."

Not yet, even to himself, in these brief uneasy days of his betrothal, had Dick Arden called his cousin by any dearer name.

"And that was the toast he meant." Ned Falconer, his thoughts on Sir Roger, did not know that he had thought aloud, till he heard his words shrilly repeated.

Joan Arden, close at his shoulder, repeated them. "It *was* my cousin Millicent mine uncle thought on all the while."

"Silence, wench," said Sir Roger angrily, while Dick cried, laughing: "Sir Roger think of Millicent before the King!" And the others laughed with him; and Mistress Ursula, making her way towards Joan (but slowly, for she still was weak with pain) bade her in a low

voice rule her saucy tongue, if she could not rule her thoughts.

But Joan snapped out stubbornly :—

" Nevertheless, it *was* my cousin Millicent that mine uncle thought upon."

And to the astonishment of all, Sir Roger broke silence, fiercely saying : " And if it were mine own flesh and blood sprang first to my thoughts this day ? Ay ! before the King himself ! What then ? " He glared around him.

Dick echoed weakly, " What then," with a sense of having been in some way arrogant, and there was a general awkward silence, in the midst of which Ned Falconer spoke with sudden warmth, and with a kindling proud look upon Sir Roger :—

" What then ? Why, then, 'twas the first day and the last," he said ; " that Sir Roger put any thought before that of the King—that's very sure."

His words were caught up with a laugh of relief, and the talk flowed again merrily. Only Lovel spoke angrily with his neighbour Jessop :

" Hear Ned Falconer lead the talk again ! "

" As nimbly," said Jessop, " as he led his men out of Tuesday's fight."

" Hang him ! " joined in Cornwallis. " What does a runaway raising his voice ? Here in a company of cavaliers and gentlemen ? "

"Have a care, boys." Colonel Petre turned towards the knot of murmurers. "Sir Roger will have no man flick Ned Falconer upon the raw."

"Who speaks of Ned Falconer?" Ned started out of dark thought, with his hand upon his sword.

"Who?" said Cornwallis, looking about him. "Who? Not I. *I* spoke of cavaliers and of gentlemen."

Ned's hand dropped. "I had forgotten," he said.

"Forgotten!" echoed Lovel with a laugh.

But it was his accepted punishment—not his shame—that Ned Falconer had forgotten.

"Gentlemen," said Sir Roger, standing up again. "I beg you to pledge my daughter Millicent. And along with her my nephew Dick, here. And whether he be a good fellow or no, and deserve her, you best can say."

"Hurrah!" cried Ned Falconer. He sprang up first of them all, and waved his glass, "Hurrah!" and with that wild cry he drained it and fell back into a black silence.

"Friends, I would thank you," said Dick, on his feet, and much at a loss for words. A thought flashed on him. "But there's one, a glance of whose eyes will thank you better than any speech of mine," he said; and he

caught his sister by the elbow. "Go quickly, Joan, and call our cousin down to us."

He sat again, well pleased with this bold stroke. It was so strange to Dick, that, being betrothed, one could never see one's betrothed.

But then he turned to Sir Roger, suddenly: "With your permission, uncle," he ended, abashed.

"That came something late," said Sir Roger. "No matter. My daughter will not come."

"That's a wish, sir," laughed Dick, "more than a prophecy. You fear lest she should hear tell of her father's treason."

"Treason!" Sir Roger looked at him.

"That sets her name," went on Dick, "before the name of his Majesty."

"Treason's an ugly word, nephew Dick, to throw about even in jest."

"I crave your pardon, sir," said Dick astonished. And a dim misgiving—the resurrection of a dead distrust—woke in Petre's eyes. Sir Roger saw it, and laughed, and clapped Dick on the shoulder.

"I'm crotchety, lad, to-day. I doubt it's the wine," he said. "Yes, the wine. There's not one of us—not Lovel there—but carries his liquor the worse for the ten days' abstinence we've held."

"But we've crack-crack-crack-blown it to

atoms to-day," cried Lovel. And he started a song.

"For the last time, gentlemen," said Mistress Ursula, while Bridget set down two bottles more. "There go the last two bottles of the cellar."

"Never damp our dryness, Mistress Ursula," laughed Lovel, "with your chill talk of *last*. When by to-night—who knows?—Calthorpe will have brought up his strength to our aid, and Noll's Rusty-pots be clattering before him, as if each were tied to the cur's tail he merits."

"But is there no further word, sir," asked Jessop, "from Calthorpe's force?"

"None, friend Kit," smiled Sir Roger, "that I impart to boys over their wine. Come, lads, 'tis time for the last cup, and so to our rounds again. In time of siege 'tis little more than a stirrup-cup we may drink, though it be to a betrothal."

"But Millicent——" said Dick.

"Millicent will not come," cried Joan, leaning impishly over the gallery-rail.

All turned their eyes on her.

"Will not come?" cried Dick, with heat. "Will not?"

Ned Falconer laughed out a sudden reckless laugh.

"And the King commanded the chamber-

lains," he said, "to bring Vashti the Queen before the King. But the Queen Vashti refused to come at the King's commandment. Even so, Dick."

He laughed again. And, as he laughed, he met the kindly eyes of the man who had beaten him in fair fight. And he could more easily have wept for sheer self-loathing.

Dick had risen. He came below the gallery and spoke to his sister, who was tapping again at Millicent's door.

"Make it my earnest request to my cousin," he said, gravely.

"I'll give ye a wrinkle, nephew Dick," called Sir Roger. "Millicent my daughter holds herself yet at the bidding of her old father."

"I crave your pardon, uncle, and hers," said Dick, more gravely still.

"She's coming." Joan called it over the gallery, and ran quickly down to join the company.

"Coming, I knew it," Dick breathed freely, throwing off his doubts. He rose, and the other men rose too, closing round him to welcome his love.

"But not for you, foolish Dick," laughed his sister.

"I gave no commands, niece," said Sir Roger.

"No, uncle. Nor was it for you." The blind girl's voice rang out and was heard by all. "It was because I told her of Ned Falconer's gibe. And she marvelled, so she said——"

But the growl at Falconer's name checked Joan's tattle. She clapped her hand on her mouth.

"What did she say?" cried some.

"I will not tell," said Joan suddenly. And Dick repeated: "She shall not tell."

"I'll tell you."

The men started. The shadow Falconer had turned human at Joan's words.

He stood, white and stammering, but alive once more, among the throng that shunned him.

"She marvelled, as you all," he said, "that one who has turned his back in the fight, dare raise his voice at the feast." Then his voice fell. He spoke no longer to them, but to himself, his hated sole associate. "And it is strange," he said, "that a man shall have been eight days dead, and speak."

The men looked in silence at each other. Then one caught sight of Mistress Millicent, come out from her room, and standing on the gallery, silent, too, while those words were spoken in her hearing; and with a glad sense of relief all doffed their hats to her.

Ned saw, turned, and doffed his. For the first time these eight days his eyes and the eyes

of Millicent Arden met. They met in an armed challenge.

The men crowded with Dick to the stair-foot, while Sir Roger went up to meet his daughter. Joan crept to Ned's side, and whispered penitently: "I have an evil tongue, Master Falconer."

"In life I was called Ned," said he.

"But I could not guess that you still so laid that matter to heart. I thought that to-day you were merry, Ned."

"Merry!" he said. "Did she think that?"

"I cannot tell," said Joan. "She will not speak of you."

"She does well," answered Ned.

"But I," said Joan gently, "I am speaking *with* you, dear Ned."

"You are a very kind maid," he said, his eyes following the figure on the stair.

"I hate you!" cried Joan violently, and darted from him.

Millicent Arden had reached the lowest step of the stair, and stood, one hand within her father's arm, a radiant figure of beauty and of pride.

Ned Falconer had seen her stand there once before. He was to see her stand there once again. And those three memories would contain all the history of his love.

CHAPTER XV

DICK ARDEN kissed the hand of his betrothed, and, still holding it in his, said :—

"Since there are a dozen gentlemen here present, Millicent, who would die for you, as they have drunk to you, I beg the same grace for each one of them."

Millicent smiled, and spoke evenly. This was the one lesson she had studied these eight days : to speak evenly and to smile.

"I thank you, good friends," she said, and gave her hand to old Petre first. "But your lives, we all know, are pledged to King Charles."

The men passed before her one by one, and each one as he passed put his wrist under her hand, and saluted it like a queen's. Only one did not advance with the rest.

Between gleams of light and gloom of darkness Ned Falconer had studied many lessons these eight days. But he had mastered none of them—least of all the lesson of false smiles and evenness.

"Come, Ned," called Sir Roger cheerfully.

"Father!" Millicent cried out; but then said coldly, "As you will." And when Ned

came to the stairfoot her hand was stretched out unflinchingly.

He looked at it, and at her, with a bitter questioning.

"Shall I kiss the rod?" he asked. Then, answering: "No. The rod itself shrinks from me," he bowed low over the outstretched hand and passed by.

Sir Roger had seen his daughter's stony look, and told her: "You've a scurvy manner, child, of doing a grace to a kinsman under a cloud."

"You asked much of me," said Millicent, "though from your daughter you could never ask too much." She was thinking how easy her new lesson would be, when only she was become more practised in it.

"Folly!" said her father, impatiently. "The lad hath surprised me. He shows me these days six times the stuff I thought to find in him."

"It is for you to judge, sir," said Millicent. Her voice was even still, but more faint.

"To judge? Ay, and to prove," said her father. And, on the sudden impulse, he called to the men who were now crowding to the door: "Stop, gentlemen! A word before you part."

They turned, arrested by the new note

in their leader's voice — of promise — or of menace ?

" There is an errand afoot." Sir Roger spoke slowly and clearly. " I will not say it is of danger. It is of almost certain death. Straight it runs through the enemy's lines. Who tries it first ? "

With a wild, speechless movement Ned Falconer was kneeling at his feet.

" I knew it." Sir Roger would have turned to his daughter, but—behold ! she flung herself upon his arm.

" No, no ! No, no ! " she cried.

Ned Falconer sprang to his feet, as a man might who had been struck across the face. And Sir Roger spoke his " How now ? Millicent ! " in downright indignation.

" Not him," she gasped, then, all bewildered, seeking words, when she did not know her thoughts — " That is—I would say — I mean——"

But her word had been caught up by the cavaliers, whom Falconer had for that one moment outdistanced.

" Not him ! " was the general cry ; " Right ! This trust is not for such as he."

" Shame, Millicent ! " muttered Joan.

" Nay, but I meant," said Millicent brokenly, " I meant—I do not know what."

" My betrothed meant," Dick Arden spoke

calmly to Sir Roger, "to claim this trust for me, as I do for myself. Is it not mine?" And, turning, he asked his comrades: "Is it not mine?"

Such a long acclaiming cry of support broke out from them all, as gave Sir Roger time for reflection.

His nephew, Ned, he told himself, would have done his errand well, but his heir would do it even better. For by carrying the letter before he knew its import, Dick would be made one with his uncle's deed. "And, once in," said that subtle, busy brain, "Dick's the man to stand by me to the death."

So, when the cheer died down, "It's well," said Sir Roger. "Nephew Ned would have done well. Well—d'ye hear me?" He raised his voice above the murmurers. "And shall do well, sirs—as well as any of you! But maybe for this purpose nephew Dick will do still better."

"That was not what I meant, neither," murmured Millicent, making excuse she knew not for what.

"Go, lads," said her father. "And you, Dick," he laid his hand on Dick's shoulder. "Come you back in half an hour when all's quiet, and hear more."

The company dispersed quickly after this, Sir Roger giving each guest farewell with a

hearty handshake at the door. Joan was sent to bring her uncle a wrapper for Dick's despatch. Mistress Ursula, busy with Bridget at the table, looked across now and then compassionately at Ned; who was standing alone, looking down into the fire, while the others crowded merrily out. So he had stood, from the moment of Millicent's cry against him. Ursula could only see his back. What was he thinking, poor lad? And what angry frenzy had possessed the girl?

The disgraced man roused himself with a shake and a short laugh, turned, and found Millicent before him.

"Master Falconer," she said, with downcast eyes.

He took off his hat, and waited, silent. So silent, that it left her nothing to say.

She began again. "Master Falconer, believe me—I did not mean—I did not mean——"

She waited so long that he must surely help her out. He did.

"To break a heart?" he said in a voice so icy-cold that her eyes flew to his, amazed. His eyes were like his voice. "Be at rest, Mistress Millicent," he said; "hearts are not so easy broken."

"That is well," answered Millicent, smiling her new-learnt smile on this new Ned Falconer of the ice-cold eyes.

And they parted with a distant courtesy.

Sir Roger Arden stopped Ned as he was passing quickly out. "Whither thou, Ned?" he asked kindly.

"To visit the walls, sir," answered Ned.

Sir Roger came back into the hall. "All's quiet yet." He looked about him, rubbing his hand over his head. Bridget ever after maintained that she had seen the first change of age on her master when she passed him then to leave the hall. He moved heavily, and dropped into a chair.

"Now, my little maid," he called to Millicent, stopping her at the foot of the stair.

"Sit awhile, sister Ursula," he said. "Sit and look with me, and say, is not our little maid the breathing picture of her mother?"

Ursula did not answer. She was all amazed. To see Roger sit down among the women! And, above all, to hear him speak his dead wife's name!

But Millicent answered. She ran. She knelt beside her father. She caught his hand, and kissed and held it, and cried in a sobbing breath: "Father, you must not! Dear father, you must not speak, no, nor think that thought of *me*."

"I must not think. Here's tyranny for you!" Sir Roger stroked the girl's hair, laugh-

ing tenderly. "I may not so much as think as I will."

But Millicent's sobs came all the harder for his kindness.

"Father!" she clung to his hand. "You know that I would die for the King—or for you? Yes, this moment, gladly." She spoke with a passion of appeal. "You *know* it, father?"

"Tut, tut, yes. Why, what's to do?" asked Sir Roger, in wonder.

"Or live for you, or for the King? You know it, father? You know I have given my hand at your bidding—given it to the King's bravest soldier?"

"Yes, yes," said her father.

"And gladly," she insisted, "gladly."

"Why, yes." He looked at her somewhat puzzled, but concluded: "It's a woman's way to weep for joy."

"Then what more can I do?" cried the girl, wildly. "What can I do? What can I do?" She was sobbing outright now. "And whence is this horrible fear that seizes me? Fear of failing—of dishonour! What have *I* to do with fear and failing? Am I not an Arden?" She sprang to her feet. "Your daughter! Their daughter!"

She stretched out her arms to the surrounding portraits on the walls. "There they stand

round us," she whispered dreamily. "An unbroken guard." She stood still, but her look travelled as her lips murmured the dear names. "Sir William, Sir Philip, Sir Roger—Sir Roger again. The Sir Rogers ever the greatest hearts of them all." She put her hand down behind her to her father's shoulder, but he withdrew himself suddenly from her touch. She did not see his movement. Her eyes were on the dead.

"An unbroken guard," she repeated, with that trance-like voice and look. "Not one that ever fell from his word or flecked his honour! Not one——" Suddenly her voice sickened and failed, and she stammered out: "Except——"

Then Ursula Tuddenham broke the silence with which she had observed her niece till now.

"Ay," she said, drily. "Sir Guy's portrait, indeed, is lacking—that might have shown the Ardens that they are of human clay."

"Ursula!" cried Sir Roger, angrily.

"Brother-in-law," she said, "I will speak. You bade me come sit here with you, and I have a word of mine own to say. Lift thine eyes, child, from those painted canvases to the legend written above."

Round the hall, above the paintings, and

below the oak gallery, was written in old black-letter characters :—

Nisi · Dominus · aedificaverit · Domum · in · vanum · laboraverunt · qui · aedificant · eum.

Millicent looked at the words, which had looked at her since her birth, but which she had never looked at till to-day.

"Here is much talk of Ardens," said Ursula, with a ruggedness not all unkind. "She who caused yonder words to be cleansed and new blazoned for all to read, was no Arden, as you know, but a God-fearing, simple woman, Alice Tuddenham"—Sir Roger bowed his head—"thy mother, child."

"My mother," said Millicent, softly. "If she had lived!"

Sir Roger groaned: "Ay, ay! If she had lived!"

"If" was an unaccustomed word to Ursula, but she could use a strange word at a pinch. She used it now, with the blunt energy of a silent woman forced to speak.

"If she had lived, child," said Ursula, "it had not been to sit in a pale blue satin gown and to *dream* of dying for the King."

"Silence, Ursula!" thundered Sir Roger; and Millicent became white with indignation.

"For this time, Roger," said Ursula, "I will speak. Nor yet, if she had lived, had it

been, as you well know, to cosset this poor child, and dizzy her young brain with pride and idleness." Then, a new application of her text coming home to her honest mind, Ursula began to laugh grimly. "Nor yet had it been to sit and rate the pair of you, like her cross-grained old sister this minute! but, as I think, to help poor silly Bridget yonder in the kitchen with her dishes!" She looked down at the one hand now freed from its bandages. "And I'll make a shift," she said as she rose, "to meet her there."

She was trotting off, with no word to detain her from her angered brother-in-law, when Millicent, breaking from her proud silence, ran to fling her arms around her, saying:—

"Me, too! Let me come too, Aunt Ursula!"

"You, indeed!" said Ursula. "In that gay gown!"

"I'll run and change it," said Millicent. "Let me come, good Aunt Ursula. Let me come. I'm—I'm frightened alone."

"Ay, ay," said Ursula, observing her with kind watchfulness. "Frightened to have sent Dick Arden on this errand of danger."

The girl started, under a new misgiving. "No, no!" she cried. "I had naught to do with Dick's going. Father! Say that I had no word in that."

"Let the child be," said Sir Roger, sullenly. "She had no word in my choice of Dick."

Ursula held to her point. "'Twas her word kept Ned Falconer back. Poor lad! That sought the occasion to clear his name. 'Twas cruel hard. Ay, ay, child. I know your grand notions. But you're naught but a little foolish maid, when all's done, and to my mind it's *nature* that a maid should hold back the man she *loves* from danger."

"How dare you?" cried out Millicent, her face aflame to the roots of her hair.

"Hoity-toity!" Ursula drew back a step. But when Millicent burst into passionate tears, and stood rocking under them, clasping her hands hard across her face, Ursula drew near again.

"Why, Millicent, child!" she said, with a deep anxiety, that made itself felt by the girl.

Sir Roger, indeed, rebuked her for hurting his child by her meddling. But Millicent turned to her gratefully amid her tears, and humbly asked her:—

"May I go don another gown, and come to you, good aunt?"

"Go, child, go," said Ursula, uneasily.

The girl crept away up the stairs, weeping, and Sir Roger looking after her, said once more:

" You do not know my daughter, Mistress Tuddenham."

" Do you know her, brother ? " asked Ursula, gravely. " Are you well assured that you know the child, whose hand you have promised in marriage ? "

CHAPTER XVI

URSULA TUDDENHAM, making her way to the kitchens, would have been disappointed had she looked back on Sir Roger, whom she had left with such a subject for deep thought. For Joan Arden had come to the hall just after Ursula left it, and immediately Sir Roger had a more pressing matter to see to. He was up out of his chair, with his hand in his breast, at first sight of his niece. "Is that the wrapper?" he said quickly. "Give it me." Then, impatiently, "It is too small."

"Too small for the weighty despatch?" smiled Joan. "Nay, let me fold the paper. I will make it fit the wrapper."

Sir Roger yielded the despatch into the blind girl's hands for a moment, but guarded it all the while with a jealous eye. As he saw how cunningly she fingered it, and folded it for its cover, he smiled good-humouredly. "Proud art thou, wench," said he, "to be handier than I that have two eyes to help me?"

Those two eyes remaining fixed upon the despatch, however, they missed the flash of vision that lit up the blind face, while the cunning fingers shaped the packet.

She gave it back to him. "I have ten eyes, uncle," she said, "to your two."

Sir Roger sealed it up. "Ten eyes?" he said, carelessly.

Joan spread her small fingers before him with an elfish smile.

He laughed. "Read, then," he said, "what is writ on this outer wrapper."

"Why, you have writ nothing yet," said little Joan. "You forget," she touched her ears. "I have two eyes more. I have not heard you write. The cover, therefore, still is blank."

"Go, silly child," said Sir Roger, angrily. Then, with a sudden whim that she should not rightly guess even that much, he seized a pen and scratched noisily over the cover.

"Yes, now," said Joan, "I hear you write."

"To Sir Giles Calthorpe. These, with haste," said Sir Roger, feigning to read over (from the still blank cover) the words he had feigned to write.

He stood up, and flung the pen from him. It fell upon the floor.

"Dick!" he called; then, "Go, send Dick hither, Joan."

Joan was picking up the pen, and putting it in its place.

"The pen is dry," she said to herself. "He did not write."

She went obediently to the door; but as she went she asked herself busily:—

"What is this secret? Why might I not know that the outer wrapper is blank?"

Ned Falconer crossed her in the doorway, coming quickly to call Sir Roger to the walls. A new movement of the enemy had been noted.

The enemy's movements mattered little to Sir Roger now. Still, he must go. And it was even better that he should go. Better he should not himself see Dick. No risk thus of questioning from the young nephew, whose wits he had always despised, but of whose staunch loyalty he was so sure when once his course was taken.

Sir Roger gave Ned the packet, therefore. "Dick is coming for these," he said. "Give them, at your life's peril, into his hands only. He shall not wait for speech with me, but haste with these sealed orders. Nor shall he open them till he is without our furthest line of defence. There he shall read his errand. His word of command be this: Obedience, silence, and despatch!"

He went out.

"If I dared!" said Ned Falconer, and gazed with deep longing on the paper which he held. "If I dared!"

Millicent had come out of her room, in a

rough brown worsted gown. She came a step or two down the stair, and asked :—

"What would you do if you dared ?"

Her voice was so quiet, and the look of her, in this dress, so simple, that Ned was able to answer her simply and quietly.

"I would give Mistress Millicent back her betrothed," he said, "if I dared steal from him this great honour." And he showed her the packet that he held.

"Indeed," said Millicent, "I think no worse thing of you."

"My uncle," cried Dick Arden, quickly, flinging wide the great centre door. "Where is he ?"

"At the Lower Gate," said Ned, with equal quickness. "You shall not follow. These are from him. You shall not open them till you are outside our last line of defence. There you shall read your errand. Your word is: Obedience, silence, and despatch !"

"All three !" Dick saluted ; "though it were death—or the devil in shape of Old Noll."

"There's God-speed coming to you, Dick," said Ned, and pointed him to Millicent.

"Ah !" cried Dick. But even now he stopped. Even now he had a thought for the other.

"Look to her, kinsman," he said, and held

out his hand. Ned raised wondering eyes to his, but did not take the hand.

"If I fall," said Dick, smiling gravely, with that obstinate broad hand stretched out still, "then this house's honour rests wholly upon thee."

"On me?" Ned was white, his voice was wrung with an unhoped-for joy. "You still trust *me?*"

"Why, lad!" laughed Dick. He grasped the hand he had waited for, left it, and sprang to meet his betrothed.

He caught her hand and kissed it, and said low and quick: "Your lips, betrothed. For the first time!"

But she drew back. "No, no," she said, hurriedly. "Not yet." And she caught, in excuse, at the packet he held. "Is this the letter? A blank cover? Why is it blank?"

"Your lips, Millicent," said Dick, sturdily.

"Why is the cover blank?" she asked.

"Dear," said Dick, in the saddest voice that was ever heard from him. "Your lips. It may be the last time, too."

"No, no, no!" cried she at that, and raised her face to him. "God speed you . . . cousin."

"Cousin!" said Dick. "A cold word."

He kissed her and sighed. "A cold kiss. . . . Farewell, Millicent!"

And with that last cry, he flung the great door shut behind him.

"A cold heart," said the girl to herself, looking after him, shivering. "Cold! Cold!"

These words between the two had passed so quickly, that Ned, who was leaving them the hall, had not crossed its breadth when he heard the great door clang, and knew that Dick was gone. Looking back involuntarily, he saw his kinswoman stand—so white, so tottering, that he hastened back to her, lest she should fall.

"Kinswoman," he called her, with a loving loyalty to Dick's last word to him. "So pale! Let me call——"

"No, no," said Millicent, standing very still.

"He will come back," said Ned, gently.

"What do you say?" she asked in a far-off voice.

"He will come back," said Ned, "that gallant gentleman." And walking a little from her, he fixed his eyes on the door by which his friend had left him.

"Heaven knows, I pray that," she cried.

Then suddenly she came to Ned. "Tell me," she said. "I *must* know."

He looked at her in silence. Her words rushed on. "For eight days past it is spread abroad that the coward who started those twelve men running was—you. *You!* And

all—and *I*—believed it, and—forsook you. . . . But it is false. False!" Her voice rang out. "For to-day you have sought a danger to which that was nothing. And honour—I know it—honour *is* more dear to you than life!"

"I have had eight days' life without it," was all his reply.

"Yes, yes," she said eagerly; "and you are a true man, I know it. The flight of the others carried you in your own despite. You *are* true. You *are* true!"

She was close to him, with clasped, appealing hands. He would not meet her eyes.

"God help me!" he said. And upon his darkness there sprang up a light out of the gloom of the past days.

"To you I will be true," he said, briefly, "at this moment that has seen a true man pass to his duty."

He paused—his eyes on that door. And then he took a deep breath and spoke slowly and clearly:

"I—am a false coward, Millicent."

She shivered at the word, and covered her eyes. But she would not believe.

"It cannot be," she said.

"*It is*," he answered her, heavily. In a little while he spoke again. "Many things are dim to me, of the blackness of that moment. Only I know that it is in such a blackness that

the true man stands to his duty; and that I, who failed from it, am false." He bowed his head.

"And you can live!" It broke from her in a low whisper of horror.

That was the worst. He waited under it. It passed. He looked up, and smiled.

"*All* is not false," he said.

But because he was gone where she could not follow him, she tried to call him back.

"Help *me*, then!" she cried. "Help *me, you!* If you see any truth."

He turned quickly: "How?"

"Tell me," she said. "But no! Let *me* tell *you* why I cried out to stop your mission."

Again he waited. Then he said, with a smile and a steadiness of a different mint from hers:—

"Confess yourself, dear kinswoman, to a more full-grown truth. Mine is not an hour old."

It was so humbly spoken, the girl did not at once perceive who was humbled; she cried out indignantly: "You are changed! You are——"

But then she broke off—stopped, astounded—drew back appalled, from the gulf of her own treachery.

"You are right," she whispered, brokenly. Her eyes went blindly this way and that. "My

aunt waits me," she said. "I was forgetting . . . many things."

He followed her to the arch which led to the kitchens. He lifted the hangings from it.

"Adieu, kinswoman," he said.

She went out without a sign.

He held the hangings, looking after her, till Sir Roger's voice roused him, asking: "Who went out there?"

CHAPTER XVII

"YOUR daughter, sir."

Ned's voice was calm, but a struggling sorrow in his aspect betrayed its secret to the older man. It flashed upon Sir Roger that this young kinsman of his loved Millicent; that, warm of heart and weak of will as he had already proved himself, he was now come under the sway of that passion before which the strongest wills go down. Ned Falconer was *his*, therefore: his by every tie, to any purpose.

He laid his hand upon his shoulder.

"Didst guess, lad," he asked, "what message it was that reached me by the hands of Joan, to-day?"

"From Calthorpe—as I hoped?"

"From Calthorpe?" echoed Sir Roger, testily (for he had meant to feel his way by degrees). "And if it *had* been from Calthorpe——"

"Then it was not?" asked Ned.

"And if it *had been* from him, I say," persisted Sir Roger, "think you that daub of plaster could patch up a falling cause?"

"It would patch up our hearts, sir," laughed Ned, "to stand for the cause that cannot fall."

"Stand for a pudding's end!" cried his uncle, contemptuously. "Come, sit you down, friend Ned," and he drew his own chair to the table. "Have done now with words, and speak out plain thoughts instead. Those thoughts, lad, that brought thee with a whole skin out of Tuesday's fight."

Ned sprang up, then sat again, and said between his teeth: "You bade me, in punishment, digest my fellows' taunts, sir. Not yours."

But Sir Roger was leaning forward to him across the table. "Here's no question of taunts," he said. "Here's matter of policy—of consideration. Here be you and me, men of discretion—men that know when a fight is lost, and have no craving to fling away the hilt after the blade—here we be among a herd of crackbrains. Sure it is for us to do them good against their wills. To do them *good*, I say. For any composition with the enemy——"

"Composition!" broke in Ned. In the whirl of his thoughts one came uppermost: this was a test, an insulting test, by which Sir Roger was trying his loyalty.

But Sir Roger went on without pause:

"Any composition with the enemy, as I say, will be for the good of all. For all, and," he spoke with slow emphasis, "*above* all, for *one*

whom thou and I, Ned, would cherish more than all."

"Sir Roger!" Ned cried, imploringly.

"Why, Ned!" the voice persisted, "a man that can look to the times that are coming would make terms with the devil himself, to smooth a path for those tender feet."

"Good Sir Roger!" Ned rose.

"Hear me out," said the other (for the traitor's doom was on him—he no longer knew honesty when he saw it). "Hear me out, Ned," he argued calmly. "If this Noll Cromwell—this rebel rascal that has been, this master of England, that shall be—if there were means to win his favour—not for ourselves, but for the child—there—by—a secret capitulation, let us say, to the enemy? Hear me out——"

"I will not, sir!" thundered Ned Falconer.

Sir Roger started to his feet—alarmed at last—but too late to quiet him.

"You do ill"—the remonstrant voice shook with its passion of indignation—"ay, though you were ten times my captain and my protector—I will tell you that you do ill—to spare my forfeit life, and then insult my honour!"

"Honour!" Sir Roger laughed out.

Ned met the challenge, quivering but defiant.

"I have flung that from me, you would say! And so you would try me, how far deeper I can fall! You do ill, sir. Ay—though your thought be good—very ill! Are there not devils enough to whisper a fallen man that he is fit for no work now but theirs—ay, and angels, too, to wonder that he will endure his stained life—but you—*you*—mine old kinsman and captain—*you*, my mirror of honour!—will sing in the same tune!"

The torrent had its way. Sir Roger had tried in vain to check it. But when now for a moment it paused, the old man cried with an eager, uneasy laugh:

"Come, come, lad, I jested."

"Jested!" Ned cried out bitterly, stabbed anew by that word. "Jested! Yes! And you are my leader! And *her* father! And there is no way for me to throw back your coward jest in your teeth!"

"Coward!" Sir Roger sprang to his feet. "Now, by heaven!" he cried, and drew his sword.

—What was that white flying figure that came from the tower-stair, and ran in blindly between the two infuriated men?

"Uncle! uncle!" sobbed Joan Arden. "They have caught him!"

"What?" cried Ned.

"Ah, dear Ned!" at his voice the girl

turned to him. "Dick! My brother! He is taken. Dick is in the rebel camp!"

"In the camp! Folly, child," Sir Roger cried in anger. "How should you know where Dick is gone?"

"It is Dr. Bertram," the girl sobbed out, "hath out his great spying-glass on the tower. And I prayed to stand beside him and be told of all that he saw. And—and—Dick opened his letter outside the wall, and then went on—on—on—straight into the midst of the camp. And there was a stir, and a crowding in the camp when he came. And he is there, uncle—there! A prisoner among the soldiers!"

"You are crazy, child," growled Sir Roger; "but I'll go see."

His quarrel with Ned was forgotten. He climbed the tower-stair hurriedly, with a muttered curse on Dr. Bertram and his spying-glass.

Ned stayed behind him only to give a word of comfort to the weeping girl.

"Nay, poor maid," he said, "do not weep so. All may yet be well."

"Why did mine uncle send Dick into yonder place?" she asked, amid her sobs.

"He did not send Dick to the camp, Joan," said Ned, gently, "but to make his way through it to some other place. To Sir Giles Calthorpe, as I think."

"Sir Giles Calthorpe! Ah!" Joan eagerly caught at that name. "Who *is* Sir Giles Calthorpe?"

"It is he that shall come to our relief," said Ned. "That is coming now, maybe this moment, to the help of Dick. It must be soon. Indeed," he ended, as he turned to go, "I had hoped this morning's letter had been from him."

"The letter! Ah! The letter! Tell me, Ned," Joan cried after him, "whose seal is it that bears . . . a short sword—in a circle—or a crown?"

"The Wreathed Dagger!" Ned stopped, his foot already on the stair. "Why, that's the seal of this very Calthorpe."

"Then this morning's letter was from him," said the girl. "I saw the seal—with my ten eyes." She held up her hands.

"From Calthorpe!" cried Ned, joyously. But then—"No, no," he said. "He told me that it was not so."

Joan persisted: "The letter I brought to mine uncle had the seal of the Wreathed Dagger upon it. But why——" she paused, bewildered—"why has mine uncle sent Sir Giles Calthorpe his own letter back again?"

"His own letter?" asked Ned in astonishment.

"The Wreathed Dagger," said Joan, "was

on the letter that I helped mine uncle seal up for Dick. The Wreathed Dagger is on the letter that Dick hath carried to the camp."

"Calthorpe's letter sent to the rebel camp!"

A blackness of instant certainty, drowning all denial, rushed upon Ned's brain.

He did not guess—he saw the truth. Calthorpe's letter! Sir Roger's speech to him! Sir Roger's "jest"!

He turned upon the girl.

"Be silent!" he cried, in a voice that shook her with fear. "We must not speak—we must not think—the thing that must not be!"

She cried out at that voice: "I am frightened! What is it? I am frightened!"

"No, no, do not fear." He seized her hands. "Do not fear," he said. "This horror will pass. Only promise me—swear to me—never, never to speak of what these ten eyes told you!"

"I'm frightened! I promise," said trembling Joan.

But he still held her hands.

"Swear!" he said, quickly. "Never! Never to any soul! By all that is dear to you!"

She pushed the hands that he was holding so hard, and so unconsciously—she pushed them up against his breast and said: "By what is dearest to me, I swear."

"That's well," he muttered, releasing her.

As he turned to go, his heart was crying: "Is there one true man?"

The answering thought rooted him where he stood.

"Dick Arden!—How would Dick Arden bear his life when he knew the errand he had done?"

A cry rang—from above—from around them.

"What is that cry?" Joan fled to him.

"What is that cry?" called Ursula, running from the kitchen, with Millicent and Bridget.

"They are coming from the tower," said Bridget.

"No, from the wall," cried Millicent.

"From both," whispered Joan of the keen hearing, standing white and still in their midst.

They came from the tower first.

Sir Roger, white, and wild, and staring, coming quickly, stumbling feebly as he came. Behind him Dr. Bertram—weeping—speechless.

"Father!" Millicent ran to him.

"Old friend!" said Ned—forgetting all else before this broken figure of woe. Joan and Ursula came about him, too. They put him into a chair.

He looked at them stupidly.

"Dead!" he said. "Cut off! Shot! Like

a dog against a wall!" Joan cried out. "What, Joan?" he turned to her. "Ay, thy brother, little maid, Dick Arden. . . . The last Arden. . . . Arden of Thirlby."

Millicent fell on her knees beside him.

"Dead! How?" asked Ned, quickly, of Dr. Bertram.

"Shot by the rebels.—He saw it," the old clergyman said, and could say no more.

The white figure in the chair talked on garrulously over the heads of the weeping women.

"There have been Ardens at Thirlby," he said, "since—since—Millicent, child, *you* know these matters. . . . A true Arden—but only a girl—only a girl. There have been Ardens at Thirlby since—tut—tut—tut—tell me!—but you're weeping. Ay, that's for Thirlby." He staggered up and looked round the hall. "*The old house!*" he said, lingeringly.

"The house!" sobbed the shamed girl at his feet. "Nay, 'tis for him, father. For him I sent to his death."

"Sent to his death!" cried the old man, in a sudden fury. "Who says I sent him to his death?"

He glared round him.

"No man, sir," said Ned, firmly, "nor will. Nay," he spoke earnestly and slow; "if your own staggered brain should say it, none will believe you."

So speaking, he got the old man back into his chair, who muttered on: "Ah, Ned! Thou'rt a good lad, Ned! So was he—that's gone."

He was dropping, it seemed, into a torpor.

"Who now?" thought Ned, swiftly. "Petre! It's Colonel Petre commands now—for the King. I'll seek him."

He reached the great door.

But while his hand was on the latch, the cry from the wall was upon them: Cornwallis, Lovel and others breaking in from a side door, sweeping up to the white slumbering figure in the chair.

"They're on us from all sides, like fiends, sir!—We can't stand.—The outer line is gone.—'Tis hottest at the Lower Gate.—We cannot hold the wall."

"He heeds us not!" Lovel fell back aghast in face of that stricken figure.

"Petre's down," they cried, "Dick's away. What shall we do?"

Ned Falconer leaped upon the table.

"Look at him, lads!" and his voice rang out in command. "Look at that old grey man, and these weeping women. *Look at them!* 'Tis the hope of his house—of their hearts—that lies dead—butchered by the rascal Roundheads in cold blood! He's *dead!* Dick's dead, my boys!" And as a cry of rage went up, he

overtopped it. "And his murderers are on us! Say"—he held out imploring hands—"*will you take a coward for your leader?*"

There was a roar, and a rush for the outstretched hands. He sprang down among them, laughing.

"Come on, boys," he cried, "Dick Arden likes things done with a finish!" And he swept them, shouting, to the wall.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE doors swung to.

"Who is gone?" murmured Sir Roger, in his sleepy stupor.

"Stay by him, Joan," said Ursula.

She went with Millicent from door to door, bolting and barring all but one.

"They cannot hold the wall," called Dr. Bertram from a window.

The din from without drowned his voice. But when the doors were fastened, the women, too, came to the windows, and they fell back a step from what they saw.

"Merciful heavens! what an onslaught!" breathed Millicent, and heard Ursula call close at her ear:—

"They cannot hold the wall."

"Then 'tis the house next," said Millicent.

"Come, aunt," she called, "come, Doctor, the great bars!"

They saw her action, though shots and cries, and the crashing blows of a ram were all that they could hear. They saw her tug at the great bars which two strong men could hardly lift.

"We cannot stir them," signed the others,

when they had strained their best to help her.

"We must," muttered Millicent.

"Let be, child, you'll kill yourself," cried Ursula.

"Not before the bars are up," said she.

They dragged the bars to the window, they never knew how; and as they struggled with them there they looked out again on the fight.

The sounds dropped a little.

"They are beaten back," said Ursula.

"He is hit!" cried Millicent.

"Who?" asked Ursula.

"Ned Falconer."

Joan screamed.

"Ah! see!" cried Millicent, her hands clasped, "how he takes them to it again, though his head streams blood."

The great door was barred, and one of the windows.

"Ah, Heaven!" cried Ursula. "The steel caps top the wall."

Millicent touched Dr. Bertram's arm, as together they fixed the last bar.

"See yonder grim man that directs them."

"'Tis the devil himself," said he—"Noll Cromwell."

All three workers stood at gaze.

"Not a bullet, see, will touch *him*," whispered Ursula.

Joan shrieked at the crash that followed.

The work was done. The bars were all up, and Millicent came to her, calmly.

"It is nothing," she said. "A piece of the wall blown in."

Through the one door left them, the defenders poured in, men and officers.

"Nothing left to hold now but the house," cried Ned. "Up, ladies, to your bedchambers. Be safe, and leave us the hall."

The women moved at his command, but paused at a murmur among the men.

"Thou hast a devil, Ned. What's to do more?" said Cornwallis.

"I'm for surrender," said Lovel.

"Surrender!" Ned sprang to Sir Roger, who had a dazed, awaking look.

"Captain — old Captain — hear us!" he cried.

"What's to do?" said Sir Roger, feebly.

"Wake, sir," said Ned, "and give us your orders."

He darted back to the window, and thrust a pistol into Dr. Bertram's hand. "Pick off each man who draws near that door. They would place a petard."

He was back beside Sir Roger again.

"*Remember*, sir!" In his voice deep called

to deep. "*You sent Dick on an errand of yours.* Remember! *Remember!*"

Sir Roger sat bolt upright.

"I remember," he said, clearly.

"And he died for it," said Ned. "And the Roundheads that shot him are about blowing in that door. *Shall we buy our lives,* and yield to them? Shall we yield to them, old Captain? *Will you live? Or die for the King?*"

"Yield to them?" cried Sir Roger Arden, on his feet, drawing his sword. "Yield? The devil take me alive if I do!"

"I knew it," cried Ned. "Hurrah!"

And every dissentient shouted with him.

Dr. Bertram had been methodically firing through a hole in the shutter. He put down his pistol now. "We're dished, Ned," he said, quietly. "The fourth man fired the match before he dropped."

Ursula stretched out her maimed arms, and the two girls ran into them.

"Ready all, and stand," said Sir Roger, clear and firm, forming his men where the rush would come from the shattered door.

"With a cheer in Noll's teeth," sang out Ned. "King Charles!"

And the roar of the explosion was topped by the roar, "King Charles!" And the crash of

the breaking door was buried in it. And the strong, steady, unstemmable stream of men that poured in at that breach—each falling man's place taken by his fellow—was broke against that leaping tide of loyalty till death. And—hand-to-hand, foot-to-foot, inch-by-inch, forcing their way—the conquerors had ten hearts to overcome behind each sword. And if it was only five minutes—if it could be only a five-minutes' stand now—it was long enough for Oliver and Oliver's men to know with a stern joy with what stuff they had to do.

Ned's sword-arm dropped, helpless. Very few of the defenders but were now disabled or slain.

"Yield, Sir Roger Arden," said General Cromwell, holding the defensive against the frenzy of the older man.

"Murderer!" gasped Sir Roger, and flung himself again upon him.

"Take him living," said Cromwell, when Parkhurst came to his help, none too soon. "The others, too, wherever you can. These be Cavaliers, indeed."

It was over. Amid the dead, and the dying, and the prisoners who would have chosen death, General Cromwell put up his sword.

Sir Roger Arden, held by three men, and

glaring like a wild beast at bay, flung him again that one word—" Murderer ! "

" Old Knight," said Cromwell, saluting him with a blunt respect, " that youth who died in yonder camp is a stain wiped from your shield."

He spoke louder, above the hoots and groans of the prisoners.

" This house," said Cromwell, " which you have held with honour, he came—your miserable kinsman—he came to sell it to me by stealth. "

A girl swept swiftly face to face with the conqueror.

" It is a lie ! " said Millicent Arden.

The General looked at her pityingly, while a shout in support of her words went up from the survivors of the garrison. Then he continued speaking with Sir Roger.

" Young Arden brought to my camp," he said, " a stolen despatch, and, at its foot, his traitorous offer written."

" Not his ! " cried Millicent.

" Sir," said Cromwell, " I taxed your nephew with his guilt. And telling him I was a soldier, not a midnight thief, I flung him back his letter, and bade him read there his death warrant. And while he looked on it, I think, in sooth, that shame touched his heart —for he spake but one word, bidding me ' Finish

quickly,' and so passed to his death. You may see the letter, sir."

"No, no!" cried Sir Roger. He flung out his hands, as if warding off a blow. "No—no!"

His flicker of strength was past, as well as his fury. His head fell on his breast.

"Father!" cried Millicent. "You *believe* this thing? Friends!"

She stretched out her hands to them all.

"Kinsman!" she turned to Ned. "Was there a drop of blood in Dick Arden's veins that treachery might stir?"

"No, Millicent, no," said Ned. She saw the gentleness of his look. The anguish of pity in his voice was drowned by the shout of "No!" that broke from all.

"Remove the prisoners," said Cromwell.

But as he turned to go, again the girl stood in his way. His keen eyes observed her searchingly. He guessed her the dead man's sweetheart.

"You are a strong and cunning man," she said, steadily; "and I am a feeble girl. But you have belied a gallant gentleman, and it shall be proved upon you."

But the thought of her powerlessness coming, "Who will help me?" she said. "Father?—No?"

She turned to Ned Falconer. "You!" she

said, confidently. "You will help me. You will find out the real traitor!"

Her father, too, at that turned his look on Ned. But Ned Falconer's eyes were on the ground, and he answered neither look nor word.

She recoiled from him: "No?"

She faced General Cromwell once more:—

"I will do it alone, sir," she said.

CHAPTER XIX

THUS Thirlby was stormed. Its heir had perished at General Cromwell's hand; Colonel Petre lay senseless and still at the outer palisado, clutching fast the fragment of a sword; and Sir Roger Arden, his women, and the remnants of Thirlby garrison, were in the hands of the Parliament's Lord-General. And as on shipboard, when a tempest drops to calm, the sailors immediately are at work, each on his task of order—splicing this rope, making good that sprung plank, cutting away that hopeless wreckage—in such a manner, with such prompt discipline, did Cromwell's steel-capped men mount guard through the house that they had stormed.

For Cromwell's word that day was clemency. Other words could he speak on other days. But whatever word he spoke was law, and that day's brief twilight had not waned before the survivors of the garrison had learned with amazement the workings of the law of clemency.

They were removed from the hall where they had made their last stand, but to be lodged with respect in their own quarters. A

sentinel stood on guard outside each prisoner's door, but he was there to guard the prisoner's goods from pillage—though little was there left in that deserted house to tempt the pillager. Sir Roger Arden was released upon parole, and allowed the tending of his daughter Millicent, while the General's own surgeon was sent to do what skilful surgery might for old Francis Petre and to set young Falconer's right arm, which a pistol bullet had shattered above the elbow.

An ordered quiet reigned thus within the house; but without — how great the contrast!

There, too, the word of General Cromwell had gone forth, and there it was not clemency. This last stronghold of Charles Stewart, this stumbling-block in the march of the Cause, was to be "utterly slighted"—every defence of it levelled to the ground. No Malignant henceforth, however rash he might be or desperate, must find so much as a breast-high wall at Thirlby to serve as cover to his madness.

And since the General purposed to ride on at break of day, his whole force—save for the two score guards in the house and for the men who kept look out against Sir Giles Calthorpe—save for these, all the strength of his army was turned to the work of demolition. And

all night long the steady sound of the pick was broken only by the roar of the blasting powder.

Within—the vast empty hall, where yesterday Petre's "roaring boys" had tumbled over one another in their play. Without—havoc, crashing masonry, the wrecking of those walls that they had mortared with their blood. Which was the more intolerable?

Millicent Arden beat up that night against both, in her flight from a pursuing thing within herself.

This thing kept calling her to look at it. Its name was Millicent—her own name. But it was not her own self. It could not be her own self—that thing! For she, the Millicent she knew so well, had moved among men a gracious figure, dispensing an uplifting influence. And that silly poor thing that was calling to her, snatching at her, had failed where it loved, and where it plighted faith had failed again. She would not own the thing. How could she own it? Who could live shut in alone with a thing like that?

"And you can live?" Someone had asked that question—somewhere. And there was an answer to it.

She could not think of the answer—she could not think at all. She *would* not!

She quickly lifted her hot head that she

had been pressing on the cool leaded window-panes, and forced herself awake to outward things. And so she became aware of the knock, knock, knock of the pick, and saw, when a blaze of powder lit the dark, that the flag that hung from Thirlby tower was the flag of the Parliament.

That drove her from her window and from her room on to the gallery of the hall.

The guard at her door drew back to let the young gentlewoman pass. She had leave to pass to her father.

But, to the man's surprise, she did not go to her father.

She paused, a white figure, bending over the gallery-rail.

The great vacant hall lay below her, now black, now in sudden light, as the flames on the hearth leaped or fell. When the flames were brightest, all the portraits sprang into life. She remembered that from a child.

She stood a long while watching stupidly the portraits spring to life and fade again. Old childish fancies began to lap her soothingly.

"Sir William," she murmured. "Sir Roger . . . All the Ardens . . ."

When there broke into the lulling sound

the living figure of the last Arden:—of a cold and disloyal girl who yesterday—under the eyes of those portraits——

The guard saw the white figure spring erect, strike its hands together in sudden anger, and look wildly this way and that. Then Millicent drooped, turned, and stole softly down the stair. She ran through the empty hall with a shudder and up the tower-stair, and knocked at her father's door.

Her father had sent her away. He had "wanted no tending"; he had turned his face to the wall and would not speak. But that was long ago. Surely he would let her come now? She knocked again. The sentry at the door was kind. He stood aside as the other had done to let her come. Then surely *her father* would let her come?

She knocked a third time. There was no answer. A fear caught her, and made her bold to push open the door a little way. She had her answer then.

"You!" said Sir Roger Arden.

He sat beside the window, a crouched blackness against the starlit sky.

"You! There's not one, then, obeys me now."

She crept away. How stern he was! Quite right. He would be sterner if he knew. Where should she go now? Who would stand be-

tween her and the thing she would not be shut in with alone.

She found her way to Joan Arden's door, but it was of no use knocking—people did not answer her knocking now. She opened it, therefore, and shut it behind her quickly.

"Go away," said Joan Arden, as quickly; "I will not have you here."

The dry, hard words matched ill with the small face all blurred and drawn with weeping.

"Why not?" asked Millicent proudly; for it was *she*, the real Millicent Arden, who had come to visit her little cousin—not that silly poor thing that nobody could want.

"Because I am thinking of my brother Dick," said Joan.

"Dick!"

One struggle, and the "real Millicent" could face it out no longer. The silly poor thing had its way.

"Dick," she cried, herself forgotten—her pride, her misdoing even—all forgotten but that simple generous heart. "Ah! dear, dear Dick," she repeated, and laid down her head on her knees and wept.

Little Joan heard the truth in her sobs.

"You are sorry now," she said fiercely, "but it is too late."

Millicent wept on, not heeding her.

Joan spoke again. If she sat listening long

to that hushed weeping her heart would soften to her cousin. And she did not want it to soften.

So—"Weeping will not help you," she muttered.

Millicent had nothing to say to that. She was not thinking of what would help her. She was thinking of dear Dick Arden. How kind he was, how loyal, how——

"You cheated him," said Joan.

"Yes," said Millicent, for that was the very thing that she was thinking.

"You lied to him."

"Yes."

"You pretended to honour and love *him*, when you wanted only to punish——"

"Hush!" said Millicent. She could not hear that other name. From the moment of Dick Arden's death one name had been quite shut out of her thoughts.

Dick's sister, too, checked herself, ashamed, with the other name unspoken. But she had not said all her say yet.

"And you it was," she cried, "that sent Dick on that errand to his death."

"No," said Millicent.

She had a moment's firmness then, and rose up and came near to Joan.

"That I did *not*. He himself, if he knows now—more than you know—if he knows all the

ill there is to know of me, he knows that I never thought—to send *him*."

Joan was silent.

"Do you believe that?" asked Millicent humbly. And Joan remaining silent still, she ended more humbly still: "I thank you for believing that," and then she went quietly away.

Quietly, now.

The sentinel in the gallery above saw the young gentlewoman come back to the hall, and stand. No fear or haste or anger this time. She looked about her. What was she looking for there in the dark? thought the man.

She did not know. There was something she must look for. No; not the portraits. She must look, she must think, she must—Ah!

The flames sprang high.

Yes, there were the portraits. She smiled at them now, the dear old portraits. But they were not what she wanted.

The flames sprang higher, and held for five seconds the whole place in a bright light.

And above the line of her dead ancestors she read the living words:—

Nisi · Dominus · aedificaverit · Domum · in · vanum · laboraverunt · qui · aedificant · eum.

The sentinel did not hear her coming

back to her room, she came so quietly. She spoke a gentle word as she passed him: then she went in and shut her door—and shut in her poor silly self with the truth that had found her.

CHAPTER XX

CORPORAL JOSHUA HIGGINS struck three sounding blows on the prisoner Falconer's door.

This was his duty. Captain Falconer was a prisoner on parole, and, as such, he was bound to report himself to the guard every four hours. He had not reported himself, nor did he do so in response to the summons on his door.

Now this Falconer was a notable captain in the eyes of the men who had fought him at the inner palisado, and a prisoner of no small importance.

Joshua Higgins, then, put his head in at the door, and shouted, with a shortness of temper which may be excused in any man at five o'clock of a cold autumn morning:

"Here! You there! You! Captain Falconer!"

No answer.

The night was as black as pitch. It was that hour before the turn towards day, and the torch in the passage had just flickered out.

Higgins groped his way to the bed, and felt all over it to get a grip of the sluggard.

Nothing there.

So he stumbled hurriedly out again in search of a light, turned the key on the place where he still hoped his prisoner to be, and, seeing at the far end of the narrow, stone-flagged passage a glimmer of light shine from under a closed door, he made his way towards it with all haste.

For by this time the corporal was in grave uneasiness. He was a soldier of well-earned repute, a picked man of the General's own guard. It was impossible that he could have slept on duty, and yet . . .

A light he must have, and a light could be had behind that door; he pushed it open therefore without "By your leave."

He was standing in the dim verge of the great hall, remote from the blazing hearth and lighted candles, and (a thing that more closely concerned him) he was looking straight down into the barrel of a musket at full cock.

Behind the musket he had presently the satisfaction of making out the wrinkled visage of a friend—Thankful John Bennett. But though his old comrade afforded him a grin of recognition, he made no movement to lower his weapon. So, before Higgins spoke, he looked over his friend's head to learn the cause of such vigilance.

And when he saw the man who sat beside the hearth—the rugged form, bent head, and knotted hands, the fiery eyes searching and questioning, as it seemed, the encircling gloom —Joshua Higgins saluted silently, and stole away on tiptoe.

Many a time had he kept, as Bennett kept now, a night-watch beside his General. Dimly he guessed, as men may dimly guess, at the conflicts of that soul. He closed the door on them in fear and wonder, and turned to his own task.

This task was more and more perplexing. A light he must have at all costs, yet he dared not move to any distance from his prisoner's door.

As he thought this, a girl came in sight, entering the passage at a lower point and carrying a lighted taper.

He challenged her.

She answered, coming on steadily towards him:

"I am Millicent Arden. I was looking for you."

"For me?"

Higgins stared at the girl, who came moving towards him like a ghost.

She was all white, face and dress, save for red swollen circles round her eyes. She had no beauty at all, she was too heavily marked with

sorrow. But she was very young, and a meek, gentle maid, it seemed, and the sight of her was pitiful.

Joshua's hand went up of itself to his forehead where he had been wont as a boy to pull a forelock to his betters. The forelock was gone, he remembered that he had no betters, but he found himself unable to speak roughly to this Malignant woman.

"How come you looking for me?" he asked.

"You are Master Falconer's guard, are you not?" said the girl. "They told me he was lodged beneath the Long Gallery."

Her voice shook as a flame shakes in a breeze when she named his prisoner. But it steadied again to the errand she had to do, and Joshua Higgins did not hear it shake.

"I'm his guard," said Higgins. "What of that?"

"I am come from a young man — a servant of the house," said the girl. "Robert Gamage is his name. He is dying, and crying out to speak. There is something he would say before he dies and cannot say. They were compassionate to him, your comrades. They called me to him to the lower kitchen, where he lies. But he will not speak to me. He calls now for Master

Falconer. Will you bring Master Falconer to him ? "

" That I will," cried Higgins (adding to himself, " If I can "). " Only lend me your taper there, and I'll go rouse up the Captain and bring him along to you. It's Mistress Arden that waits, I must tell him ? "

" No," said the girl. " I thank you. And you may take my taper. I will find my way well without that. But I beg you to tell your prisoner this and no more : that Robert Gamage, lying in the kitchen at point of death, hath sent to entreat instant speech with him."

So saying, the girl gave her taper into the soldier's hand, turned, and was quickly swallowed up by the dark.

Who so pleased as Corporal Higgins, or so anxious, or so eager ?

Back he stumped to Falconer's room, stuck the taper in a ring just inside the door, and took a good look round the room for his prisoner—for that hardened, turbulent Malignant who yesterday had kept them all at bay by his valour, and had to-day, it might be—could it be ?—escaped them by his cunning.

And there he was !

Higgins, at sight of him, caught his breath in astonishment, turned, snatched up the taper,

examined closely by its light the white-faced, sleeping boy, made sure of him at last by mark of the sword-arm in a sling, then sat down in front of him, slapped his own knees, and fairly chuckled.

Ned was fast asleep on a great chair, one leg flung over its arm, his head lying back—his position that of one so soaked through with the very spirit of sound sleep that he would sleep on his feet—on his head—tied in a crooked knot as now—sleep anywhere you might choose to put him, and sleep through anything! Never—not in the quietest night of his quiet boyhood, with the trees below his window swaying a lullaby to the silent skies above—never had Ned Falconer slept as he slept at Thirlby on that night of devastating din.

His wounded arm had at first woke him more than once with a burning throb of pain. He only felt that it was pain to-day instead of shame, and sank to a deeper sleep.

Do you condemn him that it was through ruin and defeat that he slept, and the knowledge of another's shame? There are days that command the man who has lived through them to do one thing at a time—to sleep to-night and be ready for to-morrow.

And Sir Roger had not, in the end, surrendered, and there was Dick Arden gone on

before, showing how a man may bear another's load. And over all was God, by Whom cowards can fight, and lovers master love, when honour bids, and——

And Ned fell fast asleep.

CHAPTER XXI

"CAPTAIN FALCONER!"

Ned jumped broad awake, to a smart blow upon the shoulder. Broad awake, very stiff and very cold, and with his broken arm making protest against that jump by a series of most intolerable twinges.

To-morrow was come, no doubt of that, though only a dim taper told him so, and though the title of "Captain"—so long the goal of his brightest dreams—might have persuaded him that he was sleeping still.

The name of "Robert Gamage" which that Roundhead rascal proceeded to shout at him, brought its own stinging memory.

But so it was. Sleep was over. Gamage had sent for him. Gamage was dying. He must go at once to Gamage.

Yes; to-morrow was certainly come. He scrambled to his feet; and five minutes later he was kneeling beside the dying man.

Robert Gamage had been a round-faced, reckless boy, chiefly noted for a knack he had in the handling of unmanageable horses. Some special sympathy might have been guessed between young Robert and all restive, intractable

animals. The steward Stocker shook his head, and said the boy was too "skeery" to come to any good. Dick Arden, however, had taken him in hand, and had made of him a dashing soldier. But the training had been a strange one, altogether a result of personal devotion, and much remained in Robert of the restive horse—who will eat from the hand of one master, and walk behind him, nose on his shoulder, but will allow no other living being to come within kicking-range.

It was Robert Gamage who had reinforced his master at the great sortie when Falconer failed. He had flung himself against Dick Arden's slayers yesterday with the mad fury of a personal revenge; and he lay now disabled, desperately wounded, fighting down delirium to speak.

For a time Falconer could make nothing out of the high, incoherent rattle of words.

Then it dropped to a murmur. Then: "Captain Dick," gasped Robert Gamage, "it's Captain Dick."

His eye wandered still, but Ned caught at the first clear word.

"What of dear Captain Dick, Robert?" he asked. He took the fevered hand in his. It clutched him hard.

"Them liars—murderers——" said Robert.

"They can't hurt *him*," said Ned. "He's

gone beyond 'em. No lie ever breathed can touch *him*."

"Spitting their lies at him still—they are!" cried the man, in an agony of rage, which turned to delirium again.

But Ned knew now that it was concerning Captain Dick that Robert had a word to speak, and he waited till it should be spoken.

Presently, "Can them crop-eared curs hear us?" said Robert.

Ned looked up. The two guards—his own and Robert's—had drawn a step apart. They stood talking and warming themselves by the fire. Only Bridget stood beside the bed, with a cooling drink in her hand that Gamage had refused.

"I do not know if they can hear us," said Ned; "but say what you will to me, whoever hears."

"One here," panted Robert, "a wrinkled old crab—stood yonder—told my guard—told him—told——" His voice failed.

"Take this drink," said Falconer.

He slipped his arm below the wounded man's head. Robert swallowed a few drops (as he would have swallowed live fire to do Dick Arden a service), and by-and-by could speak again.

By slow degrees, by broken words, Ned made out his story. The guards had talked of a paper—paper with a great red seal—that Cap-

tain Dick brought Cromwell. One of 'em had seen the paper in Noll's hand. They had laughed at Robert's wild denial—had said, the liars, that the paper begged Thirlby for the Ardens. And who, they said, but the Captain would beg that ?

It was this last lie that had goaded the tottering brain to the verge of madness—or over it. There was a wildness in his eye, joined with an unaccustomed cunning in his whisper, that told Ned that the verge might already be passed.

When the cunning whisper ceased by moments eye and hand went on speaking still. Finally, " You'll clear the Cap'en ? " entreated the dying man.

It was the very entreaty Ned had feared. Now, indeed, was the new day come, bringing its conflicting calls. The brave open duty to Dick Arden's name, which every living voice would urge on him, and that mute passive duty which Dick himself had imposed by the final silence of a silent life.

While he weighed these things, clear through the window came the isolated calls of the first-wakening birds.

When the tumult of song burst out, responding, and praised the opening day, Ned gave his answer :—

" We cannot clear him."

It was spoken with sad steadiness.

Blank dismay first clouded Robert's pleading eyes. It was followed by a dawn of dull mistrust.

"You could get a look at that paper," he said, stubbornly, between his teeth.

"*The paper!*"

In a flash duty was become clear, active, imperative! The paper! Which was doubtless in Sir Roger's handwriting—which would prove him guilty—which would make Dick's sacrifice of no avail!

Certainly he must get that paper. How? Somehow—at any price.

Those watching, desperate eyes saw the flash on Falconer's face. They marked his changing look and kindling eye. Master Falconer would get the paper! Robert saw that. But why? Not clear the Captain? Yet get that paper? Yet so eager to get that paper? Well then—then—what then?

A poisoned doubt hovered.

"I'll get that paper from Cromwell, Robert," said Ned, "if my life will buy it of him."

"And then?" Robert was staring at him very strangely.

"Then," said Ned, "I'll ask a kindness of you for the Captain's sake."

"Ah!" said Robert, warily. "And what's that?"

" I'll ask you to trust me—that I'll do with that paper—the Captain's will."

Silence—while the winged doubt flew and transfixed the sickened mind.

" Trust you ? " said Robert. Ned looked at him. Was it madness, the surly cunning of those eyes ?

" I'll trust the Captain "—Robert spoke with slow distinctness—" and myself."

After that, Ned stayed by the bed a full hour without getting any further sign from Robert Gamage. He lay in a stupor, as it seemed. And presently Ned himself dropped into a broken sleep.

It could have lasted no more than a few minutes, for, when he awoke, the two soldiers by the fire had not changed their positions. But one had raised his voice a little, and his words could be heard beside the bed.

" Ay. The General hath sat all night beside the fire in the great hall." It was Corporal Higgins spoke. " No sleep for *him*."

" Ever, after one great work done, Oliver prepareth thus a greater," replied his comrade.

Turning to look at Gamage, Falconer started to see the wild gaze with which he fixed the speakers.

He whispered something. Ned bent over him.

"The court," he made out, "the gun—their gun—the great gun!"

"Ay!" cried Ned eagerly. "Their great gun? The gun you helped Captain Dick bring in? When I failed him—when you helped him? Ay, the gun stands yet in the court—just where you placed it—before the great hall window."

"The great hall window, ay," said Robert, and laughed.

"What of the gun?" asked Ned, gently. Sitting by, possessed of the youth and life that were Robert's yesterday, he wished passionately to give the dying man his last wish. "What would you have?" he asked.

"The gun—beside the gun," said Robert.

Ned Falconer understood, or so he thought. It seemed a natural wish in this half-tamed creature to die in the open, in the shadow of his master's trophy.

Ned crossed over to the fire and spoke to the guards.

The men were not unkindly, and the prisoner was clearly dying. They would do what they could to give him his last wish.

"We'll carry him out and lay him in the court when the guard is changed," said Corporal Higgins. "And that will be within half an hour. So I'll back now with you, Captain, to your own quarters."

Ned said "Good-bye" to Robert Gamage for a while.

He knelt by him. He told him that he would leave no stone unturned to have an audience with General Cromwell in the great hall without délay.

"In the great hall," gasped Gamage.

Ned said he would get the paper from Cromwell that very hour, if he could.

"So would I, sir," said Robert Gamage, "if I could."

It was strange and cold to hear him say "sir" at that moment of intimate sympathy, and the look that he averted was colder than the word.

"And I'll bring the news out to you in the court, Robert," Ned concluded.

"The court," said Robert Gamage, and said no more till Master Falconer was gone.

Ned went instantly, only bent on doing his errand quickly enough to bring good news to Robert before he died.

When he was gone :—

"I trust the Captain," said Robert Gamage, "and myself—myself."

CHAPTER XXII

HALF-PAST six struck and the guard was changed, but one sentinel kept his post.

In the great hall Thankful John Bennett watched still beside the Lord-General Oliver Cromwell. There he had been since one in the morning, and there he would remain until dismissed.

Some while after Millicent Arden had passed from Joan's room to her own, and when the fire that had lighted her was black and cold, General Cromwell, opening the door of his bedchamber, had called to Bennett for lights in the hall.

Bennett immediately, with the boldness of old service, had begun a sage remonstrance—a recommendation of longer sleep. But he checked it when he saw on his General's brow the look with which no oldest friend dared meddle.

Swiftly then the soldier went to work to furnish such creature comforts as he could. Bright light, warm fire, a friend within call—this was all could be done for Oliver to-night.

The fire soon crackled and blazed, the table

was dragged alongside of it, the two great candlesticks held aloft their beaming points of light. Bennett's " all " had the acknowledgment of a mechanical sound of thanks, and he withdrew to pace the hall. While Oliver Cromwell, heavily drawing pen, ink, and paper within his reach, sat down to ponder a letter.

For Colonel Hammond (young Robin Hammond, the General's friend) held King Charles in his guard at Carisbrooke. Robin had scruples regarding the Army's present course and future projects. Robin was dear to Oliver's heart, and familiar to that heart was the bitterness of inward strife. Robin must be answered.

Hours struck and passed unheeded. And at five in the morning, when Corporal Higgins looked in upon his General, he was wrestling with that letter still.

It was done at last. Robin Hammond was answered. The letter, that is to say, was written. The whole toil of one groping mind was drawn together and set down for the enlightening of another. And General Cromwell sat back in his chair.

Very still he sat for a while. Then, with a sigh, he stretched his hand out for the seal.

In doing so, he lifted weary eyes to the

candles. He stopped, amazed, to see them guttering down into their sockets.

"Bennett!"

He raised his left hand, his right still stretched for the seal. His harsh, strong voice was tired.

"General!" Bennett advanced to his General's elbow and saluted.

A subdued hum of voices rose without.

"What sound is that?"

Bennett marked with compassion how his General spoke—as if out of a dream, motionless, staring still at the dying candles.

"Godly Major Parkhurst, General," Bennett answered, in a matter-of-fact voice, "with some in the guard-room, whose praise for yesterday's mercies is set forth as the morning sacrifice."

"What!" asked the General. "Is it day already?"

"Even so," answered Bennett. "Your Excellency hath watched all the long night."

With a strong effort Cromwell roused himself.

"Set wide the shutters, friend," he said. And he set to work, but slowly still, to close and seal his letter.

"Bid Major Parkhurst wait upon me in an hour's space," he said. "I will sleep the while." And looking upon the name he wrote,

he murmured, "And rest be with thy tossed soul, Robin Hammond!"

Did a misgiving cross his mind of the power of that letter to minister rest? He dropped his head upon his hand.

But just then Bennett flung back the shutters with a clash, and at the sound General Cromwell looked up. A splendid flaming sunrise filled the sky, and brought the exhausted man stumbling to his feet.

"See!" he cried. "See, friend Bennett, what a glory was abroad—while we worked by taper-light!"

"A promise of storm, General," said the soldier. "The sky is streaked with blood."

"The more haste to the day's work," said Cromwell.

He pushed aside his chair and crossed to the window, and he smiled sternly when he saw the progress that his men had made in the destruction of the defences.

"And, indeed," he went on, "these stout hearts work with a will. Spirit braces sinew. The outer defence is levelled already. The whole will be down by noon."

"And yet another stronghold of tyranny rooted up and cast out!"

Bennett responded with the glowing eye, the chanting voice, the exaltation, which

such natures are wont to quaff from one another.

His triumphant words chimed well with a thought in the letter which Cromwell had just closed. Not with its reasonings, which, one by one, he had abandoned, but with its appeal to results. This appeal (how moving, and how rapidly reversed!) drew fresh force both from Bennett's words and from the work going on beneath his eyes.

Cromwell stood by the window, with folded arms, breathing in the cold, crisp, morning air. How his soldiers toiled! How the ramparts of tyranny crashed and fell! Long he watched them in silence, emotion gaining on him more and more, till, at last, on a rising tide of strong excitement:—

"It is the sun—ay! the *sun!*" he cried, "that rises yonder! And though it streak the sky with blood, we must forth to our work and to our labour till the evening!"

But now it was time for Bennett's practical side to strike in sturdily.

"Thou to thy sleep first, General," he said. "Or yonder shaking sickness will return on thee."

And as Cromwell continued gazing out, Bennett dealt yet more faithfully with the General.

"Nay, come," he persisted, and even dared

to take him by the arm. "'Tis a dark day for the seven thousand in Israel, well thou knowest, when Elijah lieth along under a juniper tree and requests that he may die."

Recalled by Bennett's touch to the anxious wizened visage confronting him, Cromwell dropped from his exultation with a sudden kindly laugh.

He clapped Thankful John upon the shoulder.

"As like the prophet I," he said, "as thou to his ministering angel! But it is a shrewd reminder of my weakness, and shrewdly backed by experience moreover." And he turned to go.

But at that moment a door opened.

Bennett instantly was before it, and gave the challenge:—

"Who goes there?"

"Edward Falconer," was the reply from the threshold. "A prisoner on parole."

"Stand, Edward Falconer, or I fire," said Bennett.

"I desire speech with your General," the voice persisted, "as soon as he be stirring."

Cromwell had paused at the door of his room.

He could not in the distance distinguish anything of the newcomer, save that he carried his arm in a sling, and that behind him loomed

the form of Corporal Higgins. But the young peremptory voice made him smile. Here was a Malignant who carried himself as if a master in Thirlby still.

"And who are you," asked the harsh voice of the victorious general, "that take so bold a tone?"

CHAPTER XXIII

BENNETT stepped one step back when his General advanced, but his eye and hand were still on the alert against the intruder; and Falconer, followed by Corporal Higgins, advanced into the hall.

As the full light showed his features clearly, Cromwell started.

"Ha!" he cried. "*I know you!* You led the defence at the inner palisado!"

For the life of him the older soldier could not repress an instinctive liking for the young one. He scrutinised him closely, his good opinion taking strength from all he saw. So slight, so weak a form, he thought, surely never housed so brave a spirit.

At last: "You are a soldier." So with a grave smile pronounced the master-soldier.

The young man flushed to his hair.

"Sit, young sir," said General Cromwell. "You are weak from blood-letting."

Young Falconer sat down face to face with his opponent, who observed him some moments longer, and then turned and told his guards:—

"You may leave us. Both."

Corporal Higgins obeyed without a word,

but Thankful John Bennett stepped to his General's shoulder.

"Please you, General," he said. The rest was inaudible to Falconer, but he had no doubt that it carried a warning against himself.

"I had not been thy general, friend," Cromwell answered, with a dry smile, "if I could not know a true man when I see him."

At that there was nothing for it but for Bennett to withdraw.

He did so, with the strongest protest that a human silence can convey.

Thus easily and promptly was Ned Falconer's first step attained. He was immediately alone with the man who held the Ardens' lives and honour.

And, as immediately, every plan he had formed, of how to address and to persuade him, vanished wholly from his mind.

"Your errand?" asked Cromwell.

Ned Falconer was silent. He *had* an errand. His memory held just that. Nay, a twofold errand. It was coming back to him now, and with it was borne to his memory a ringing farewell: "If I fall, this house's honour rests on thee."

Cromwell smiled. For, indeed, it was not in nature to be angry with the youth for being abashed at his presence.

"Nay," he said, "if your errand need

pondering, you might have let me sleep the while."

At that Ned Falconer left pursuing after his forgotten tactics, and spoke the thought that came.

"You called me a true man, sir," he said, "but I know not if I have to speak with a true man or a knave."

Now this, when out, fell so far short of the discreet opening Ned had planned, that, in a zigzag lightning of thought, he saw before him at once the ruin of his mission and the fierce sneer of his old tutor in State-craft—Lord Bingham.

Cromwell answered him, however, with no worse than a grim smile.

"A true man," he said, "speaks with the same speech to all."

"Why, that's true!" cried Ned Falconer, "if the devil said it."

"On, then, with thine errand," said Cromwell.

"This it is," began Falconer (for now he had hold of it again). "My kinsman, Sir Roger Arden, of this place, his daughter, all his family, have now no defender left but I. Their lives are in your hands." He paused.

"You come to ask my favour for them?" asked Cromwell.

"No, sir," replied Ned. He spoke firmly

and simply. "I come to treat with you on their behalf as with an enemy. For even though you be not the incarnate fiend we held you——"

"So," broke in the General, looking at him very gravely. "you are assured I am not that. How?"

"Why—by——" Ned hesitated; then: "By *this*," he said, and touched his bandaged arm. "This is not a devil's work."

"Young man," said the older soldier fervently, "the witness of your words is as rain on thirsty ground."

"Now, may God forbid!" Ned started, appalled by opposing thoughts that rushed on him. "May no presumptuous words of mine go to strengthen thoughts of yours! For that you have done devil's work before this day, we know. And some say you cherish a blacker project still—yes, even against His Majesty's own sacred person!"

And the young man gazed with wonder and horror to think what man this was with whom he talked.

"So," said Cromwell, slowly and sternly, "you go your way, young sir, I mine. And at this crossing of our paths, what is it you ask of me—your enemy?"

Ned rose up from his chair.

"I am Sir Roger Arden's ward," he said.

"I have great wealth which he hath guarded for me, and hath set safe in foreign lands beyond your reach. Set a price, sir, upon this old man's freedom, and on the freedom of his family, and upon—one other thing that I shall ask of you. I will pay you what you will!—and will thank you."

He paused; he was seeking words to name that other thing—that supreme thing—the traitor's despatch.

Cromwell was moved by the young, inconsiderate rashness that laid itself so open to him.

"I will consider," he said. "The one other thing shall be doubtless your own indemnity?"

"Mine?" Ned laughed. "Faith, no, not mine," he said. "What should I do with a helpless freedom—a freedom on parole? It is otherwise with my kinsman. All his family are women. And he himself, my old captain——" There came such a sadness in Ned's voice as caught his hearer's notice. "Sir Roger himself," Ned ended heavily, "may well compound for peace. He will strike no more blows, my old captain."

"Why so?" asked Cromwell.

Ned paused. At last, in a low voice: "The heart is killed within him," he said.

"I take your meaning," answered Cromwell, with compassion (for doubtless, he told himself, the brave old knight had dearly loved

his treacherous heir). "Killed by that black treason of yesterday?"

Ned made a quick movement to speak. Then he sighed.

"By the treason of yesterday—yes," he said, briefly.

Cromwell turned with a sudden sharpness and fixed his eyes on the young man. He scented in his words and looks, for the first time, an under-meaning.

Ned Falconer's look and words cleared quickly, however, as he resumed: "But as for me—my heart is but just born! And if you should free *me*, sir, why, my best hope would be to make you well regret it!"

Cromwell smiled, the mist of suspicion dispelled by the other's rashness.

"This one other thing you speak of—what is it then?" he asked.

The moment was come. Ned came back to his place at the table—came back to face the arbiter of Sir Roger's fate.

So coming, and turning, he faced also the open hall window, and even as he turned he saw a musket raised quickly to its level and pointed at General Cromwell's back.

"Hold!" he shouted—sprang on the gun and struck it up—seized it with his one free hand—wrestled desperately with the desperate strength that held it.

Cromwell turned at his cry and saw all. He drew a pistol from his belt.

"Thou skulking knave!" gasped Falconer, thrown this way and that, still hanging on the gun with his one hand.

"Knave thyself!" shouted back a voice, which, to Ned's horror, he knew.

Robert Gamage—for it was he—overmatched Falconer easily, even without the added strength of madness. Cromwell dared not fire, for the two men were so closely locked. And the frenzied man's weapon, wrested from Ned's grasp, was levelled at his breast—when strong arms were flung round Robert Gamage from behind, and he was wrenched down from the window.

"The man is mad!" Ned Falconer was instantly calling out of the window to Corporal Higgins. "He is wounded and dying! Spare him!"

He leaned back upon the shutters, panting hard.

CHAPTER XXIV

GENERAL CROMWELL strode up to him where he stood.

" The assassin is known to you ? " he asked. " Who is he ? "

" Robert Gamage," gasped Ned. Then he raised his eyes to Cromwell's. " The loving servant of Dick Arden—whom you shot yesterday."

" Is it even so ? " said the General, with emotion. He, too, spoke from the window.

" Be not sudden with the unhappy man," was his order.

Then he added, very sternly and clear : " This gentleman hath saved my life at peril of his own. *What bad soldier* is on guard without there ? "

Major Parkhurst hurried into the hall, several others crowding with him.

He answered Cromwell boldly. " No bad soldier, General : Corporal Joshua Higgins."

" Higgins ! " echoed Cromwell. " Then how came the fellow by ? "

Corporal Higgins now elbowed his way through the staring, questioning knot of men at the door.

"So please you, General," he said. "The fellow was thought to be dying. He craved air, and we laid him in the courtyard without. I did but stoop over him to hear what it was he muttered, and he had me, of a sudden, thrown over on my back, and my weapon from me."

Never had the Corporal thought to sing so small a song to his General—and a half-score of his comrades standing by!

But his General looked on him with mildness.

"You did well, Joshua," he said. "Keep the poor wretch secure, but harm him not."

"As for that," said the Corporal, his spirits reviving in him, "we'll have him tied fast enough this time, live or die."

Ned moved, with an impulse to go to the unhappy man, but thought of his errand yet undone, and waited.

Cromwell saw the movement. He had had an eye and a wondering conjecture for young Falconer all the while he was talking with Higgins. The youth stood so aloof, so still, and, as it seemed, dispirited.

When the General now dismissed his men, he said to Parkhurst aloud for all to hear: "Nay, leave me. You may see"—and he pointed to Falconer—"I have very sufficient guard."

But Falconer made no sign of heeding or of hearing this word of praise, nor did he look up when the door shut behind the soldiers till Cromwell spoke, saying very cordially :—

" And now we'll talk of the indemnity. And for all the ill you promise me, Captain Falconer, I think I must e'en lump in your own freedom ——But what's this ? "

He broke off, as Ned came slowly towards him.

" You are hurt ? No ; yet you shake like a girl. What ails you, man ? "

Ned sat down beside the table. " The worst ill," he said, " that a man can be shamed with."

Cromwell stared at him, then he laughed outright.

" What ! You think yourself a coward ? " he cried. " And sprang upon death unarmed ! What folly's this ? "

" I could not see a murder done," said Ned, in a dull voice. " But for all that—you see." He was looking down with disgust upon his shaking hand.

General Cromwell leaned across the table to him, touched his elbow, and spoke with a rough kindness.

" I see a weakness of flesh, young man," he said, " not of spirit. There's the word of an older soldier. And with that send you the arch-

deserter packing. It is *he* who would try ever to sneak in his own treason by the door of our infirmity."

Ned gazed upon him. "You, too, know that?" he said.

"As in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man," said Cromwell.

Then, as one who had spoken more freely than he meant, he drew back, and said with abruptness: "And now to your offer of ransom. To be honest with you: I pitied already the old knight and his kin, and held no purpose at all against him. His stronghold is destroyed, and for himself, I think, as you say, that he hath stricken his last blow. And in truth I may now grant indemnities, for"—he said this slowly and weightily—"with the fall of this fortress the last spark of life hath departed from your cause."

He saw Falconer's quick movement of denial, and smiled.

"I had forgot," he said. "While you yourself live, you live my enemy. Well, sir, as things have fallen, I have a mind none the less to leave you here behind me when I march hence, to heal these broken folk as best you may." He rose. "And thereto sort yourself, Captain Falconer, and let me away to my sleep."

"No, no!" cried Ned, on his feet at once. "One moment! Hear me! Not my freedom

—no! If I have to your mind earned aught of you, then hear me, General, I entreat!"

"What now?" Cromwell paused, but he frowned. Not thus had he looked to have his clemency received.

"Another thing"—Falconer urged his point more vehemently—"that one thing I spoke of—dearer far than my freedom! The thing I'd buy of you—beg of you—at the cost of my life! The letter—the letter with the seal of the Wreathed Dagger! The letter that shames our house!"

"And that proves the justice of young Arden's death! *No.*" Cromwell spoke with strong displeasure. "You may not juggle with justice, Captain Falconer."

He strode resolutely to the door, the harsh, dominant frown furrowing deep lines on his forehead.

Many of his masters had found themselves his servants at that frown. Not so Falconer. He had other things to think of than Cromwell's anger. He flung himself across its path.

"Justice!" he cried with passion. "*Justice!* What more would you have? You judged his life forfeit. You have taken it—the bravest life." At that, a tenderness to the dead swept every other thought away. "Ah, say!" he cried. "Did Dick Arden die in

silence? Tell me—was there no word of defence?"

"None," answered Cromwell, shortly. "The youth shut his mouth, and died. Died, I will say it, like a man."

"As he lived!" Ned Falconer saluted that upright memory. Then he turned to Dick's slayer. "And will not one death suffice?" he demanded. "Will you be at pains to prove and to blazon this shame upon a broken house? You have the power, I know it, sir. I ask you to give that power away. And, as you are a man, I think you will give it."

"What would you have?"

Cromwell stood. His anger had given place to a sense of bewilderment, which yet strange to say, was not mistrust.

"What would you have?" he asked. "The old knight hath heard and hath credited my words."

"He hath heard your words," said Ned. His voice rang hard and cold like steel. "No living man that knew Dick Arden credits them."

"And that's a good reason I should keep this evidence," said Cromwell. His hand was thrust into his breast.

"Keep it!" retorted Falconer. "If your justice needs more victims, keep that paper! It will give you more victims. *Her*—first of all!" he cried suddenly.

"Her?" asked the General. Then he smiled with a kindly remembrance. "Ah! the gallant young maid," he said. "She that gave me the lie so bravely."

"Gallant!" answered Falconer, in a passion of sorrow. "If you knew her nature, sir! All her thought is of the Ardens' honour, and of truth to the King. The day that you make her to know—as you *can* make her know by that paper—the stain that lies upon her house—that same day—I believe it, sir—her tender life will snap." He broke off, then: "Have you a daughter?" he quickly asked;

"Ay, *that* I have!" said Cromwell.

"And will you deal to such an one a mortal wound?"

Cromwell was pacing up and down in an unaccustomed hesitation. He chafed under the certainty—strong, though indistinct—that there were things here not made wholly clear to him. And still against the rising dissatisfaction, his belief of Falconer's honesty stood firm.

"The wound is dealt," he said presently, "by the hand that did the sin. Truth is the one surgeon."

"You say that very lightly," cried the lover. "And if she die under the surgeon's knife?"

A door opened above them.

Cromwell saw the young man's face trans-

formed as "Hush!" he whispered. "She is there."

General Cromwell, in his pacing, had reached the far window beneath the gallery. He could not know whose door it was that had opened above his head. And he could not guess what the sound of a footstep had set free in Falconer—a love that had been kept under—kept under all night and all day—that had been starved, beaten, denied its faintest word, lest all other words should lose their sense—and that came back upon him when he heard that footstep—a full, free, all-whelming flood. For now duty, honour, love—all spoke her name. Now his life *must* be laid at her feet.

But it may be that Falconer's face told General Cromwell as much as can be told to those whose day of young love is gone by. For he stood where he was, turned his back upon Falconer, and looked steadily out of the window.

"Who is below?" said Millicent, over the gallery, in a low, frightened voice.

She had wakened from her short, late sleep with a confused sense of tumult.

"What was that noise?" she repeated. "Who is there?"

"Kinswoman!" Ned called up to her in a low, tense whisper.

"You!" she said. "What was that noise? But *you are safe.*"

"You have wept all the night!" said Ned. "All the night!"

"With pride for my dear cousin," she said simply, "and with shame for myself, who so ill repaid his love."

"Hush, dearest," said Ned. "Dearest kinswoman, we are not alone."

"Poor maid! poor lad!" thought Cromwell.

He came forward to the table and gathered up his papers.

"Who is it? Ah!" Millicent shrank back with a sound of horror.

"You may speak unimpeded, Captain Falconer," said Cromwell quietly. "I leave you."

He stood a moment yet, however, as if in thought, his right hand in his breast.

Ned's eyes had never left Millicent.

"*Will* you speak with me?" he said with longing. "But it is cold—and you so weary. And yet——"

"I will bring my cloak," said Millicent.

"Yes, yes!" he cried. "And then come! Come down to me."

As she went into her room:—

"Captain Falconer," said Cromwell.

Ned turned. Who was this? Cromwell? . . He had forgotten Cromwell.

"I perceive," said the General, "that the

care of this young maid's life is in your hand. I give you the paper you asked."

"General!" cried Ned, advancing eagerly.

"And the best use you can make of it, mark you, is to lay the whole truth before her."

"You do not know all," said Ned.

"I know your only tempering for clay is fire. Yet is my judgment of this matter in no degree the master of yours. And to your judgment, young sir, I leave you. Bennett!" he called.

Bennett was instantly at attention just within the great door.

He heard young Falconer say to the General very fervently, "I thank you, sir. In the name of my house, I thank you."

Bennett surmised that his General had given some rich reward to the youth who had saved his life. But, glancing that way, he saw Falconer hold in his hands nothing but a red-sealed paper.

It was a paper that Bennett had seen once before.

"Ha! Bennett," said the General. "I go to my hour's sleep at last. Captain Falconer hath speech here with his kinswoman Mistress Arden. Remain on guard without the door."

Alone—Ned tore open the paper. The first sight took him by the throat.

Calthorpe's proud promise, and his great

careless splash of scarlet wax. The firm print of the Wreathed Dagger. And the horrible words that followed. Horrible! Unmistakable! Yes. Although the steady hand with which Sir Roger Arden had penned defiance to his King's enemies had learned to creep here, to crawl and to totter, under its weight of hurry and shame, still unmistakably it was Sir Roger's hand that had written—"If General Cromwell!"—"the House of Thirlby"—"secretly delivered"—Ned Falconer read no more.

"Show *this* to his daughter?" his heart cried out. "Not while my life can keep it from her!" And he flung the vile thing from him upon the coals.

But it would not burn. It fought for its life: it was so strong and obstinate. It writhed up away from the flame. It lifted clear into view now one word, now another.

"Cromwell"—"secretly"—"the Arden family"—the traitor's words showed black on the deepening brown.

The door on the gallery opened. Once more that light footstep. This time it rang fear, louder than love—fear for love's dear sake.

Falconer snatched the nearest weapon from the wall. He kneeled, and with it he thrust and ground the paper among the hottest of the coals.

"Will the fire not blaze?" said her gentle voice just at his shoulder.

He started, glanced aside at her, but kept his shoulder to her still. How faded and lined that dear face was with watching!

"Let me help!" she begged.

"No, no!" His voice was rough, and still he did not move to let her come.

"It's woman's work," she said.

"Not yours."

He answered so shortly that she was rebuffed, and drew back in a piteous silence.

But a trembling smile stole its way as she watched him, and: "Is it yours?" she asked. "Who find no better kindling than a stubborn parchment, and stir the fire with *my father's Naseby sword?*"

CHAPTER XXV

" His Naseby sword ! "

Ned Falconer plucked the blade back from the fire and looked at it.

" Why, so it is," he said, in a hushed voice.

Millicent took the weapon from his unresisting hand. Reverently she rubbed away the smoke that had dimmed the blade. When it was clean and bright once more :

" Poor sword," she said, " that stood alone between your King and rebel pikes. Dishonoured so ! "

" Poor sword ! " echoed Ned Falconer.

How tenderly she handled the dear relic of honour, and kissed it ! She stepped aside to hang it on the wall.

Not a movement of hers escaped him ; and still he never left watching the tinder that crumbled among the coals.

When she turned to come back to the hearth, he could let her come. The flames had won.

" Your kindling burns," she said quietly, her eyes following the direction of his.

" Burns," he answered, with the same hush upon him—" burns, and falls to *nothing*."

He drew a deep free breath. There, on the

hearth—nothing—a charred fibre that the puffing air could waft harmless where it would: behind yonder door, a broken old man to comfort: and before him now, one being only—Millicent.

He turned his eyes on her at last. And was this the look that he had averted—this the voice her heart had called harsh?

"Dear Millicent," he said, "I have a strange thing to ask of you: standing here—what you see me, disarmed and disabled, and spotted in honour by my own deed."

"No," she interposed softly, "washed clean in honour by your hundred deeds of yesterday."

"Can that be?" he longingly asked. "It should be. It should be a man clean in honour that asks now to take *his* place, Millicent, with you."

"His place?" she looked up.

"Dick Arden's place," said Ned.

With a startled half-cry she turned from him.

He did not move. But he looked at her—turned from him so, with parted lips, wide eyes, and quick-coming breath—and across the little distance he asked her his life's question:

"Will you give me Dick Arden's place with you?"

And that was how it came to her—her life's

question. When she had shut it out—when in pride and in penitence alike she had shut that question out of her mind—it came to her, it stood before her face, and said: "I concern not you alone."

What to say? What to think? How to think at all—with life whirling itself into new shapes moment by moment? What to hold to? She must be true. She must (the old nursery words came back) "be good this time."

While she tried to think, her lips must have spoken mechanically some word of "soon," for she heard him answer the foolish word.

"And if," he said, "Dick Arden hears what I ask, he knows why I ask it so soon."

"And *I* know!" she cried eagerly, ashamed to have seemed to accuse him, and she lifted eyes to him with a sweeter trust in them than he had ever dreamed. "Because of our bitter need it is," she said, "that you are so quick to offer a shield to a broken house—and"—she faltered—"to a most weak, wavering heart."

"You know better than that," he answered, with honest plainness. "Surely you know that it is because I love you—because I have loved you always—ever since the first moment—there." And he pointed to the stairs where first he saw her.

She looked, and she remembered, and she knew that she had known his love ever since

that first moment, too. And she knew that now she must tell him everything.

But she could not speak. She looked up, dumbly entreating him to wait. She pressed her hands together. She was not angry, he saw that: she was trying to find words. And he could do nothing for her—but only wait.

"That is it," the words came brokenly at last, "I knew it. And I—loved it—(still he must wait)—and I was untrue to it. What is love for, but help? But I loved *myself*. And when you needed me—oh!"

She could not go on. Tears choked and blinded her. To think when he had needed her—how bitterly—to think what she had done.

"I deserved it." He was trying to help her, but he did not know how.

"Deserved!" She caught the word and threw it from her. "Who *deserves?* What do *I* deserve? What are you giving me?" She flung out appealing hands against his excuse of herself. "What is love for?" she cried, and ended, "No. There was no love in me—*then*."

At that he thought the hands were his. But, no. She waved him back still.

"And *he?*" she asked, in a shamed voice. "Did *he*—my betrothed—did he deserve that I should cheat him?"

"No, Millicent," answered Ned Falconer steadily.

"And punish him, only to punish you, whom I was bound to help?"

"Help me now," he said.

She stepped back from him, warning him away.

"Oh, Ned," she tried to say, "oh, dear, dear Ned, there is no help in me! Have you forgot? The worst of all—yesterday—when you—you had to compel me to remember my word—to him?"

But Ned Falconer stopped her.

"Now that is done," he said; "I'll hear no more. You have nothing left to tell me. Only this: With all the ill that you know of me—and that you do not know of me—will you love me, Millicent?"

"Dearest, kindest, best," was the answer she found in the end, and that in his arms, weeping.

Weeping, laughing, both together:—"No, no!" he cried eagerly back. "No more talk of best. Dearest, since God so grants it. But no more of best."

And they were very sedate in talk after a while, as became a boy and girl who had found out their mistakes in life, and would never, therefore, make mistakes again.

They promised each other a thousand wise things—no longer to live upon fancies, to bring henceforth to this workaday world honest

plainness—true knowledge of themselves and of each other.

"Above all, no more dreams," said Ned, and the lover's voice turned hard at the waking of the deserter's memory. "No more dreams that fail in time of need. No! We'll follow truth wherever it may lead—to each other or from each other" (this came lightly, with her hand closing the tighter on his for the words). "But truth either way. No more dreams."

She, for her part, was thinking how hardly she had judged him.

"I will never judge anyone again," she said.

This was excellently wise and sweet. He could but wonder at her in silence.

"It is a hard road you show," she said later.

"Hard! Was anything hard?" he thought.

"This road of loyalty to truth," she said, "at whatever cost."

He agreed to that.

"But it is the honest road." She paused. She mustered up her resolution. "And we will take it," she ended.

"Yes," said he. "If my right should be your wrong——" She cried out. But he persisted. "Even to us," he said, "that might come. And if it should come, we'll stand each to our flag, you and I. For we will be true

strangers, dearest—dearest—rather than fancied friends."

The word "strangers" struck at her, nevertheless, and shook her. But her breath soon wavered back to steadiness as she looked at him, saying: "But oh! how glad I am—how glad—that only the one clear road lies now before us."

So was he.

"This dear house," he said softly, "that we'll build up together as best we may. That door"—he pointed towards the tower-stair—"he who sleeps now behind that door."

"My father! Poor father!" she whispered.

"Yes," said Falconer. "There's a wounded heart that you will heal."

Once more she gave him that look of cloudless trust, and as his heart leaped up to meet it:

"And, first of all duties," she said, "we have to find out yesterday's traitor, and wash the lie from Dick Arden's name."

CHAPTER XXVI

He saw the cloudless look search his, and wonder dawned in it, and trouble dimmed it, and it dropped at last disheartened, and still he had not a word to say.

She did not at once withdraw herself from him. She held his hand still; she held it, indeed, in a closer, frightened grasp, and:

"What—what is it?" she asked stumblingly.

How cold—how dull his answer:

"We cannot clear Dick Arden, Millicent."

"Cannot clear him?"

Her hand only lay in his now: it clasped no longer.

"It is not possible to either of us."

His words were horrible to himself. The first thing that his dear love asked of him—so good a thing—so simple! What had possible or impossible to do with his love's first wish? He took up his leaden burden, none the less, and, with a dull persistence:

"Neither you nor I can clear him, Millicent," he said.

"Not clear him?" Her voice came low pitched, glowing from an inward indignation.

She glanced at him—a sudden flashing glance. Then :

" What ! " she flung out. " Can we forget him, then ? "

" Forget him ! " cried Ned Falconer. And of a sudden the girl knew her own anger for no more than a little spark to a great flame.

" Forget Dick Arden ? " he repeated. " As he stood here, taking me by the hand—the runaway's hand—as he stood there, crying : 'If I fall, this house's honour rests on thee ! ' " Falconer stood up. " When the parched throat forgets cold water," he said slowly, " my soul forgets thee, kind Dick Arden ! "

It was Millicent that was forgotten. She saw it. Humbled and confused, she asked herself, what had she done ? Judged her lover, misjudged him—already ?

She rose up and went to him.

" I am wrong," she said. " I am wronging you again already. Forgive me."

It was not very hard to say, nor yet to answer, and, after that, sitting side by side with him again, she could tell him more.

She told how her heart longed and prayed to atone to her cousin, and how, in the sleepless hours since his death, this task had shone out plain before her. She would take no joy for herself ; she would admit no thought of joy— " I forgot that," she confessed, " but I must

remember it now"—till she had expiated her falseness to Dick Arden by one loyal work for him, till she had unmasked the villain who was ready to sell his King's fortress—till she had proved to all the world that Cromwell's insult to Dick was a lie.

When it was all told she looked at Ned timidly, and, seeing no change, no encouragement in his face:

"This seems a dream, maybe, to you," she said. "But all the night I saw my way more and more plain. I, untrue to him yesterday, to be true to him in this thing to-day. Is it not a plain duty? And an easy one, too? For, believe me, I have thought of many things. How we may trace Sir Giles Calthorpe's despatch, and know what persons had the handling of it. Few persons, surely, save my father and yourself?"

Such a sudden strange change came on his face that she thought he saw now some promise in her plan, and she went on very eagerly:

"Yes, surely the way is easy. By these means, surely, we soon shall find out the miserable wretch in whose place my cousin died."

But there she stopped of a sudden.

For she became aware that Ned Falconer's changed look was not for her words—that,

rather, he would have hushed her words—yes, the grasp of his hand on hers meant that: and that his look—that strange, living look—grief, was it, or love, or warning?—it was directed past her, whatever it was, over her shoulder, towards some other person. And, frightened, terribly frightened, though she knew not why: "Who is it?" she whispered to him, and dared not turn herself to look.

Ned dropped her hand, and rose to his feet. She turned then.

And it was only her father!

He had come from the tower-stair and stood behind them. She laughed out in her relief.

But Sir Roger Arden took no notice of his daughter. He stood where she had seen him, looking at Ned Falconer.

She went to him, and took his hand and kissed it, as she had been taught to do from a child. This was all the morning greeting that a daughter's duty enjoined, when Sir Roger Arden's thoughts were otherwise engrossed.

But after it she slipped her hand through his arm, for he looked to-day so white and wan, she almost forgot he was her father, longing to lift all his cares from him, as if he had been her child.

"So early risen, dear father?" she said. "You should have lain longer. You are worn with lack of sleep."

"I do not rest," said Sir Roger, shortly. "I am best afoot."

His gloomy eyes were fixed still on Falconer.

"Well, what's this?" he said sharply. "Silence where *I* come? What be these secrets? Nay, I heard you." He turned upon his daughter. "Some easy way your baby eyes can see through the slough that we are stogged in—stogged to the throat!"

He shook his daughter's clasp from his arm roughly.

"I want no petting nor cosseting," he said, "nor no signing nor beckoning from you, Ned Falconer, neither."

Millicent drew back, dismayed. She was used to sternness, but not to any roughness, from her father.

He made his way with a lagging step towards the fire, and there, disregarding, as it seemed, the two whose eyes were following him, he stood sullenly watching some flakes of tinder that fluttered on the hearth.

But all the while, despite of seeming, he listened—head, shoulders, idly-fixed eyes—all listened.

And suddenly he faced round on them, erect, asking fiercely:

"What's this talk between you that must be hushed when *I* come?"

But if Sir Roger Arden had thought by his

sudden turn to surprise some conference or secret, he was disappointed. Ned Falconer had nothing to say, and Millicent nothing to conceal.

She answered her father without any hesitation :

" I spoke of unmasking the traitor," she said, " who would have sold his King to Cromwell, and who murdered our dear cousin as surely as——"

" Stop, Millicent ! " cried Ned Falconer.

" Why ? " She turned, amazed. Falconer's face was white.

Helpless, uncomprehending, she looked at her father. He, for his part, stood firm and square, his hands behind his back, his eyes bent upon Falconer with a sardonic smile.

" Ay, truly," he asked, " why stop the girl, Ned ? Nay, she'll need a reason."

And, indeed, Ned found those dear, questioning eyes turned once more upon himself.

He met them with a quiet sorrow that stilled her surprise into awe.

" You heap up sins, Millicent," he said slowly, " upon this—unhappy man. To Dick Arden it may well be that he meant no ill. He meant even, it may be, to advantage him."

" Advantage him ! " echoed Millicent.

" It may well be so," said Ned. " If this deed seemed to himself worth the doing——"

"Worth the doing!" she cried. "An infamy!"

"But if to him—in his blindness, his error——"

"Blindness? Error?" the girl repeated; and Sir Roger laughed out.

"If in his sin," said Ned, in a low, firm voice, "the man thought that such an evil could promise any good—at least, he meant no evil to our cousin."

"Tell me," said Millicent, fighting (she fought this time) against that doubting, judging voice within her—"tell me that it is not because you think lightly of the deed, that you will not help punish the doer?"

His look answered her. But still, weakly, very piteously, she entreated: "Tell me."

"Ay, tell her that, Ned," said Sir Roger, with a chuckle. "Unpack all thy thought to us, lad."

The old man sat down. He drew himself near to the fire, and spread his hands out towards its warmth. But his head was turned over his shoulder towards the other two, and to one of them it seemed that a mocking demon smiled at him out of his old Captain's eyes.

Ned Falconer turned from that look, and, speaking to his love and from his heart, he quickly said:

"I think that there presses on the doer of

this deed a punishment so heavy that none who guesses at it would add to it one feather's weight."

There was silence in the hall at that. Even that mocking figure by the fire was still.

Wise Millicent broke the silence.

"This is your kind heart," she cried, "that would fain believe that so black a villain suffers remorse—as might one of us."

Then the figure by the fire laughed again.

"Black villain—well said!" cried Sir Roger. "Thou art over-matched, nephew Ned. Let young Mistress Wisdom be. She hath eyes all too clear for soft, silly mists of compassion to dim them."

"Father!" cried Millicent, astray and bewildered, knowing she was mocked, and not knowing why.

And at that, "Nay, girl, you're right," said her father harshly. "A traitor's a traitor, and there's an end. But now"—with a trembling, furtive look he drew a chair near his—"sit down here beside your old father, and tell me"—addressing her, he was all the while watching Falconer—"all your plans for bringing *this* traitor to the gallows."

Ned Falconer turned towards the door.

"Nay, sit, Ned," called Sir Roger after him. "What ails you?"

"I go to dress my wound," said Ned Falconer shortly.

Millicent rose and went to him. "May I help you?" she asked gently.

"One way you might," he said.

"And what is that?"

"Abandon this task, Millicent. Believe me, it is not for you."

"Tell me at least," she said, "what is it that clouds for you a way I see so clear? Can you not tell me?"

He shook his head, and she asked him, wistfully:

"Is this the pinch of truth already come—each to follow what each sees? Our roads part soon."

And upon his instant, eager denial of any parting, broke her father's angry call:

"Let Ned Falconer go, girl, for a marplot that he is, and come you here and tell me all your scheme."

CHAPTER XXVII

So they parted. So Life, that seemed new-made half an hour ago, showed itself to be yet in the making. Not through dreaming pools was the love of these two to run. Rocks broke its course already. He must go, and could not leave with his love so much as his undivided thoughts; so many of these went out past her to the lonely figure by the fire—to the father who was calling his child to come to him, yet had shut every door against her, and sat entrenched within the desolate fastness of his guilt.

Millicent waited a moment when her lover was gone, asking herself whether her father had seen their love—whether she could already find words to tell him of it.

And the brooding eyes by the fire waited too, wondering—could Falconer be trusted to keep the dark secret which plainly he knew? —And, if so, what was that whispering with his little maid at the door?

And the sick brain took up once more its weaving of plan after plan, by which to ward off the derision the world heaps upon the schemer who has failed. Yet through the brain's web

struck one thread that was not of the brain's weaving: His little maid must know nothing of such matters. He must stop the little maid from meddling.

At that he called her again.

"Come, thy scheme, child! Come and tell it me."

But he did not want her near beside him, trying to cling to him, and he kept her at some distance by his look.

He spoke, however, in a kinder tone. "These matters are not for thee, Millicent," he said. "These matters are for men."

It was joy and relief of heart to her to have her father of the same mind as Ned, and she cried:

"Then you yourself will find the traitor!"

His look fell from her.

It was strange. He had answered this word, "Traitor," so often in his mind; when Francis Petre had looked it, in indignation; when Dick Arden had spoken it, in jest. He could answer it still. Yet old Frank Petre lying now at death's door, and Dick, who had died rather than earn it, were happy, while he——. One thing certain, he would not answer that word to his child. No; let the child keep her notions.

She saw his face soften. He smiled even. Then he said:

"You think such matters mighty plain and simple, little Millicent. No, sit there where you are," for, at the gentleness of his look, she had thought she might draw nearer. "I'll wager I can guess thy scheme," he said, and smiled again. "Thou'lt set each man's name of the garrison upon a slip of paper, and weave spells or charms or what not, and draw a slip by lot blindfold, and then swear the slip thou hast drawn has the name of the—of the——"

"Of the traitor?" said Millicent. "No, father. We have another thing to do."

At her clear, thoughtful voice her father looked up at her quickly.

"What's that?" he asked.

"We have first," said Millicent, "to get from the rebel General that miserable letter that he holds."

"Letter?" Sir Roger spoke confusedly.

"The letter," she said, "from Sir Giles Calthorpe with the seal of the Wreathed Dagger. The letter that came for you and that was stolen before it reached you, and that was sent by the traitor to the rebels by our cousin's blameless hands." She wondered that she must use so many words to make clear to her father a matter surely present to his mind.

But her wonder was eclipsed in the consternation that shook Sir Roger's soul.

For he had forgotten the letter! He had

clean forgotten that General Cromwell held still that fatal evidence against him!

And if his brain were to fail him—that servant—nay—that master—whom he had trusted and obeyed against all else—if his brain failed him—what was left?

He spoke in a low voice—hesitating—timorous.

"Ah, yes," he said, "the letter——. That's well thought on. Cromwell hath the letter."

"But you will ask it of him, father, will you not?" said Millicent.

"Yes," said her father. "That must be my part. I will ask it. Well thought on, indeed!"

"And thus it will soon be proved," his daughter went on, "that the letter you meant for Dick Arden was changed before it reached his hands. For the letter you sent was to Sir Giles Calthorpe, was it not?"

"To Calthorpe?" Sir Roger hesitated.

"You told him so," said Millicent.

"Ay, to Calthorpe—who else?" said her father. "Surely, yes, to Calthorpe."

"And you had doubtless superscribed it to Sir Giles Calthorpe?" Millicent went on.

"Superscribed it—had I? Let me think—let me think," said Sir Roger.

"Never stay to think, uncle," said Joan Arden's weak, clear voice.

"Joan!" cried Millicent and her father.

Neither had seen the blind girl steal in, but she stood at Sir Roger's elbow.

"I am come in good time to spare mine uncle's thoughts," said Joan. Her face was turned towards him, her keen ears gave vindictive note to each tremor of his voice.

"Your letter was surely superscribed to Calthorpe, Uncle Roger," she went on. "Why, have you forgotten? You would have passed a jest on me while the letter was still blank. You would have made me guess its superscription. Surely you remember?"

"Ay, ay!" said Sir Roger uneasily.

"And I was too quick for you," said Joan. "I told you the cover was blank; and after that you wrote the superscription in my hearing and read it in my hearing: 'To Sir Giles Calthorpe. These, with haste.' Surely, uncle, you remember now"—she spoke with a quiet simplicity—"that you superscribed the letter?"

"Ay," said Sir Roger, "superscribed to Calthorpe the letter was—that is clear."

"As clear as a dry pen can write," thought little Joan; and her last uncertainty as to her uncle's guilt was gone.

Millicent drew a long breath of satisfaction.

"It is, then, as I thought," she said. "The

letter you meant for Dick was changed, dear father, before it reached his hand."

"How d'you make that?" asked the old man warily.

"I saw my cousin take his sealed orders," said Millicent, "from Ned Falconer's hand, for I was here; and, indeed"—she hung her head—"I think I was the last to speak with our dear kinsman in life."

"Enough of that!" cried her father roughly. "How you harp, woman-like, on a dolorous string! Did Dick Arden tell you that the letter he received from Falconer was blank?"

He must be careful now, he told himself. He must note every point. He must keep that sluggish brain awake—awake.

"No," said Millicent sadly. "His speech was of—farewell. But I, to turn his speech, must needs see his despatch. And I asked why it was blank."

"Ah!" said Sir Roger. "And he said?"

"'Farewell,' no more," said Millicent. "But sure," she added, and the tears of a too-late loyalty filled her eyes, "it was for the clearing of his honour that I marked the little matter. For now we need only two things—first, to know who handled the letter between you and Dick Arden."

"Why, none handled it but mine uncle and

Ned Falconer," broke in Joan suddenly. "You have heard that."

Millicent turned and looked at her cousin. "What *traitor* handled the letter," she said quietly. "You know *that* could not be Ned Falconer."

"Ned Falconer? No!" cried Joan shrilly, and suddenly his name brought the memory of her promise to him. And she had come very near breaking it—and she longed to break it now—and yet—it was her promise to *him*.

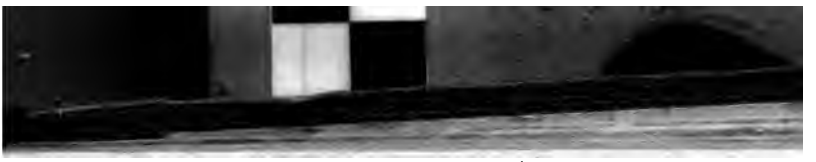
Millicent went on quietly: "And after that, dear father, if you can but have the letter itself from the rebel Cromwell, all shall be clear as day."

Sir Roger got to his feet, leaning on the table.

"The letter? Ay, the letter," he said.

There had been a change in the noises from without, which had passed unnoticed by the little group within, engrossed as they were in other matters.

The knocking and the crashing had ceased a short while back. In its place came the mingled rushing surge of measured feet, of calls, of commands: farther off, of the neigh and the tramp of horses: from all quarters, that ordered stir of preparation for the movement of a great armed force, the which to hear makes an old soldier young again.



Sir Roger Arden had not heard it.

But now the great outer door of the hall was opened by Major Parkhurst, and through the door could be seen : first, Bennett immovable at his post, and beyond him the crowded courtyard below and the clear autumn sky above.

"The General comes this way, sir," said Parkhurst. "The hall must be left to him."

The Roundhead officer looked inquisitively at this group of Malignants to whom Oliver had extended so great an indulgence.

Then he nodded. They were helpless folk, truly !

He marked the broken carriage, the wild eye, the trembling gait of the old knight—who had fought sturdily, too, the old knight ! Yes, Oliver had chosen the objects of his pity wisely. He himself could have chosen no better. Now, this admission was rare in Parkhurst, who held fast to his right of judging his commander.

When, therefore, Sir Roger Arden addressed to him a request for a short interview with General Cromwell, Parkhurst made no demur about forwarding the old knight's wish.

Sir Roger withdrew to his bedchamber, to await the General's permission, and Millicent Arden and Joan went their respective ways—Millicent to work down the tumult in her heart

under the orders of Aunt Ursula, and Joan to sit alone, with tight-clenched hands, repeating over :

" I promised—I promised *him*. ' By what's dearest,' he said. And I promised."

CHAPTER XXVIII

PARKHURST awoke his General, and told him that his hour's rest was gone, and that the troops were making ready for the march. And Cromwell joined his officer very shortly in the hall, with no trace left on him of the "weary and o'er-watch'd night."

Parkhurst made him a brief report. The defences of Thirlby were down. The scouts sent out to those quarters whence the advance of Calthorpe might be looked for had signalled all quiet to the south and west.

He then took Cromwell's orders, voicing his opinion on some of them, as was due to himself—but doing this with the brevity and prompt submission that were exacted by his General. And, finally, he reported Sir Roger Arden's desire to speak with Cromwell, giving to this the stamp of his approval.

Cromwell made no reply. He stood weighing in his hand the letter for which he had given a whole night's rest, pondering, maybe, as befalls the writers of long letters, whether it were, after all, worth the sending.

At last, with a quick sigh:

"Here, Parkhurst," he said—and held it

out — "These to the Governor of Carisbrooke."

Parkhurst's eye lit with a fierce glow:

"Who holds Charles Stewart," he said; and he took the missive into his hand with a kind of awe.

"Who holds Charles Stewart," said Cromwell drily. "To his hand, with speed, and by a sure messenger."

"Thankful John Bennett," suggested Parkhurst.

"Good," replied Cromwell. "He must give them into Hammond's hand only."

Parkhurst turned the letter over. He could not let it go without his word.

"Strength to young Robin Hammond's sinews may this letter be," he said.

Cromwell made no answer, and Parkhurst thought fit to push the matter further.

"He needs strengthening, General," he urged. "Robin Hammond doubts."

"He is flesh and blood," said Cromwell shortly. "And the task we have in hand would make cold iron sweat."

"The task we have in hand!"

The fierce light of triumph came again to Parkhurst's eye, but he knew by Cromwell's tone he dared press him no more.

So he turned to go, but paused, remembering Sir Roger Arden.

"And the old knight?" he asked.

"What of him?"

"He asks speech of you."

"Let him come. I will mount and ride hence in half an hour. The letter from Calthorpe brought me by yonder rascally young man may be no more than a subterfuge. But in case he be nearing us in truth, I will not waste a man on him here. Let him do with these ruins the worst he can. I will towards London to meet and strengthen the convoy that brings—the Prisoner."

At that word Parkhurst had all, or nearly all, he wanted, and with grave emphasis he asked:

"Charles Stewart comes once more to London?"

Cromwell looked up at him steadily, deliberated, and answered him:

"Even as thou sayest. *Once more.*"

"So be it," said Parkhurst. He called up the tower-stair to Sir Roger:

"The General will speak with you. You may enter, sir."

And Parkhurst left the victor and the vanquished face to face.

Sir Roger advanced, and with a distant and ceremonious salute—"I may speak with you, General Cromwell?" he asked.

Cromwell pushed a chair towards him—clumsily, but with a rough respect.

"In your own house, sir," he said, "to-day as yesterday."

"But with a difference," said Sir Roger.

His tone was lofty, his smile bitter. And his thought, as he noted his adversary's heavy carriage, was that the fellow was a clown as well as a knave, and should be easy dealt with.

"With this difference only," answered Cromwell. "We have taken means that this house of yours can no more be an offence to our cause. For the rest, it is, as I have told your kinsman, your own to-day as yesterday. We ride hence immediately."

Sir Roger glanced at him aside, suspiciously. What was the purpose of this frank address? Was the clown a more cunning knave than he had thought him? He answered, upon his guard:

"This is marvellous clemency."

"Your power is broken," said Cromwell, with plainness. "Your cause is dead. I speak it not in taunt, but in sober fact. And our quarrel is not with private persons. Is there more to say?"

Thus Sir Roger Arden saw himself brought to the point at the clown's time—not his own.

And therewith the self-confidence, based on long habit of command, on station and on

breeding, shook; and with that tremor came back the former soul-quaking dread: What if, when all else was gone, what if his mind itself were no longer a match for its work?

He rallied every force, and it was with an exterior calm and full of dignity that he answered his enemy:

"One thing remains, sir, more priceless to me, as you will believe, than house or fortune."

"Your soul?" said Cromwell.

"My honour," said Sir Roger Arden. "And in the name of my house's honour, I am here to buy of you the letter brought to you yesterday by my nephew"—he paused, but, with a visible effort, pronounced the name—"by Richard Arden."

"What! You too!" cried Cromwell quickly.

"*I too!*" The old knight started up with a sudden violence that astounded General Cromwell. "Who else?" he shouted, stammering, "Who—who has dared to meddle in this matter?"

The trembling fury of the broken old soldier touched the heart of the other in his mid-strength and mid-victory.

"One who wishes you only well, sir," he answered soothingly. "Your gallant young kinsman, Captain Falconer."

"Ned Falconer!" gasped Sir Roger, and dropped back into his chair. "Ah! that's well

—that's well. And yet—yet——" The anxious voice, the growing wildness of the eye, drew Cromwell's closer attention. "Have you shown Falconer this paper?" asked the old man.

Cromwell answered him slowly: "Not only shown——"

His words were drowned in the frenzy of Sir Roger's cry.

"You showed it him!"

But instantly, desperately, he clutched at his breaking self-control.

"I am hasty," he said, and Cromwell noted more closely still the immediate careful smoothness of his tone. "Yet I hold that to me, as to the head of the house, this evidence was first due."

"And to you, sir," said General Cromwell, "I offered this evidence at the end of yesterday's fight."

"That's true," said the old man. "And I refused it—in my heat. You see me, General" (and piteous it was both to see and to hear his would-be genial simpleness), "you see me what I am—a testy, rash, old soldier. To-day, however, I request of you the paper that I refused in yesterday's folly. And to-day—you will give it me?"

"To-day I cannot," said Cromwell shortly.

"*Cannot?*" cried Sir Roger.

"I have said it," said the General.

At that the weak control broke.

"Cannot?" the old man cried wildly. "You'll hold this evidence against us! You'll pursue us! You'll—you—but, no. No, no!"

He leaned across the table, and with a quick, crazed, cunning whisper:

"Hark ye, General," he said. "I will buy this paper of you, with a price worth a conqueror's taking. For, old as I am and broken—something broken, I confess it"—his breath caught, and he passed his trembling hand over his head—"something broken," he murmured, "under these late blows of Fate—I am not yet past good use. I have knowledge of many State secrets that may serve you. Only give me that paper and you shall find I know many—many——"

He sank back.

"How shall I take you, sir?" said General Cromwell, slowly, with stern eyes fixed upon him.

"For a man," Sir Roger leaned forward again, "whose brain is a storehouse worth a new ruler's buying. For one"—he hurried on—"who, seeing for himself when a cause is lost, and holding——"

"One who, holding a stronghold for the losing cause," cried Cromwell, "would have sold it to the winning cause—ha!"

He had risen suddenly to his feet. His

piercing gaze never left the weak figure that now fell back huddled in its chair.

"Thou miserable old man!" said Cromwell slowly. Scorn and astonishment contended in his voice.

"The paper — I will repay you — the paper!" Sir Roger muttered still.

"Get to thy prayers," said Cromwell. "Seek out, seek out some knowledge of thy God, thou cunning fool—that could'st not read the heart of thy fellow-man—not even in the bloody end of thy wretched messenger!"

But then he stopped, struck with a new horror.

"Thy messenger!" he said, breathless. "Doubtless *thine*, and doubtless ignorant of what message he bore. Ignorant, innocent, as his bearing spoke!"

In the passion of reproach that broke now over the speaker's soul Sir Roger Arden had small share.

"God pardon my blindness!" he murmured, as, with short, quick paces, he walked this way and that.

"Innocent! Yes," he repeated, "doubtless innocent, as they swore."

"Who swore it?" cried Sir Roger, in staring terror. "Who?"

Cromwell stopped short in front of him.

"Thy kinsman, old man," he said. "And"

—he looked the traitor in the eyes—"*thy daughter.*"

Sir Roger Arden dropped his head into his hands. In deep thought Cromwell stood before him. Then in a slow, changed voice, he said:

"And well it is for thee that this other blameless victim of thy crime comes pleading to me for mercy while yesterday's blood cries out to me for vengeance." He walked away, but presently returning: "Hear me, old man," he commanded, and Sir Roger looked up. "I will not shorten thy brief space for repentance. But—have done with thy vile policies. Seek out some other way to look once more in thy child's clear eyes. Thy secret is with thy two kinsmen: with him I slew for it—the hand of my God," he cried, "being heavy on me for my sins!—and with this other who begged thy letter from me at the price of all he hath. And who hath it—yes," he said, as Sir Roger looked up quickly, "thy kinsman, Captain Falconer, hath the letter, and entertains no baser scheme than how to shield the helpless. Thy secret is with them, and with thy God. Begone! Think well upon it. But speak no further with me. Go!"

Sir Roger Arden had got to his feet somehow. He made his way to the tower-stair. Cromwell heard the old man's stumbling footfall reach and cross his threshold. The door

closed. And then the climbing passion with which the soldier struggled had its way.

"The brave lad!" It broke from him with a groaning cry. "Innocent!" he said. He dropped into a chair beside the table. "So foolish I—and ignorant—as a beast before Thee." Great shattering sobs shook his thick-set frame. His head was bowed between his outstretched arms.

CHAPTER XXIX

A GIRL heard the unwonted sound of a man's grief. And with the darting thought—"My father!"—she ran from her room and looked down from the gallery in the hall. But that rough-built prone form was not her father's. Surely she knew it for—but no, that could not be.

She looked again. Amazed, she hesitated. Then, be it who it might, she could no longer hold aloof, but came softly down the stair, approached the crouched figure, and saying timidly, "You are in great trouble, sir," just touched his arm.

"Who dares?" cried Cromwell, starting violently.

Yes, it was Cromwell,—it was their arch-enemy—who confronted her, and who next moment recognised her.

He controlled at once his anger and his grief.

"The young maid!" he said. "The young maid," and, looking upon her with compassion, as she stared back on him in numbed wonder, "Ay, ay," he said. "I am in trouble. But what brought you to soothe an enemy's care?"

"I do not know," she faltered. "I was

frightened. I never saw one—a grown man—in such grief."

"Poor little maid," he said, regarding her still with the look that she could not understand. "Grown men have many griefs. And errors. Ay, and sins. Young gentle maids do well to show them kindness. I have one such maid at home," he said, and smiled, "as tender to me as thou, I know it, to thine old father yonder." At that he sighed and ended: "Poor little maid."

"You speak so strangely, sir," she said, tremulously.

"Strangely? No, no," he answered her.

"Strangely—yes," she repeated. "I cannot tell how. As if you pitied me."

"Why. So I do. So I do," said Cromwell.

"But for what?" she asked.

And then, even, as she asked it, the thread of this brief sympathy snapped. For she remembered that it was this man had killed Dick Arden. And she recoiled from him with the cry:

"You pity me for that deed of yesterday?"

"Even for that," he said sadly.

"And you—the doer—dare proffer pity!"

She looked at him once with a dauntless defiance, then turned and left him.

But as she walked proudly towards her father's door, she heard her enemy say:

"'Tis the true pity, that would heal if it knew how."

And the grave voice woke in her the wondering question: "Could the voice of such a man as this ring true?"

She stopped and spoke as quietly as he.

"If that be true," she said—"if your pity seeks to heal, you may prove it so."

"And how?"

"My father hath asked of you," she said, "a certain letter."

"Ay."

"Have you given it to him?"

"No."

"No!" Expectation died out of her eyes and in its place there shone a settled scorn.

"No, truly." Her voice was still quiet. "To give that simple means of healing would not sort with the pity—the tender pity, that stabs in the back, and shrouds a dead man in a lie."

Then clapping her hands together in a sudden amazement, "Ah!" she cried out; "what a power is man's to deceive! Since *this* man—even this—known through broad England for evil—could seem to me for a moment good."

She turned upon him, and "What ill," she asked piercingly, "had Dick Arden ever worked you that you blacken his helpless name? What ill?"

"None to me," General Cromwell answered slowly.

"To whom, then?" she demanded.

He paused. He stood up, and, with a regretful sadness, answered her:

"Indeed, I think to none."

She started, and stared at him. Then, thrilled with hope—nay, with victory—she cried: "You think that Dick Arden hath worked ill to none!"

She darted to the tower-stair.

"Father! father!" she cried. "Hear this man!"

Cromwell rose to his feet, as a door above opened, and a man's step hurried down the stairs. With folded arms and knit brow, he waited, his grave eyes on the panting girl: who waited too, erect, triumphant, beside the archway of the tower-stair.

As her father entered, she caught him by the arm, and pointed him to Cromwell.

"Look, father!" her voice rang out. "This man—this! who killed our cousin, and hath slandered him in death—he avows him—he himself—he avows him to be innocent!"

"What have you said to the girl?" gasped Sir Roger Arden, thick and hoarse.

Cromwell answered him very sternly:

"I have not called that young man guilty."

"You hear him!" cried Millicent. "All the house shall hear!"

She would have run to fling open the great doors then—but her father seized her by the arm.

Now, the noises without had, at the signal of a gun-fire, rushed to their top point, and dropped instantly to quiet; and Cromwell heard, behind the girl's indignant outcry, the ring of hoofs on the paved court, as his horses were brought to the door.

Sir Roger Arden heard it too. In that sound lay his only hope.

He was holding the little maid's arm harder than he knew, nor she neither; dismayed bewilderment left no room in Millicent's consciousness for pain.

"Silence!" he whispered fiercely. "You meddle with you know not what."

But General Cromwell called Sir Roger Arden to him in a tone that he dared not disobey. He loosed his rough hold on his daughter and she sank breathless upon a settle.

"Sir Roger Arden," said Cromwell, "the truth is strong and will prevail. Only he who hurt can heal."

He pointed to the girl, who sat gazing at them with wide eyes.

"Think on it well," he said.

The great door opened.

"Ready, General," said Major Parkhurst. And the two men who entered with him passed swiftly between the General's room and the courtyard, carrying saddle-bags and arms.

"Good," said Cromwell, and he took his steel cap from one of the men.

While he fastened it: "One thing, General," said Parkhurst, "What of the madman? Shall we hang him up before we march?"

"What madman?" asked the General.

"He that would have shot you this morning. Servant to the young traitor whom you shot."

The General stood still.

"Let him go free," he said, after a brief pause. "And may the Lord have mercy on him. And on us all."

He finished buckling his cap.

"The letter! Father!" gasped Millicent.

"Silence, girl!" Sir Roger said again.

But as the General turned to go, she sprang up, crying:

"He shall not carry away the letter!"

"Silence!" her father repeated; then, fearing lest the girl's insistence should ruin all, "Hear me," he said in her ear. "All's well."

"Well?" she cried.

"Yes.—All's well.—Yes," he insisted. "Ned Falconer hath the letter."

CHAPTER XXX

GENERAL CROMWELL stood on the topmost step outside the great door, exchanging a word with Parkhurst, and scanning the distant knoll of dwarf oak round which his advance guard was already passing out of sight. He heard his name spoken, and, turning his head, found the young maid by his side.

"I crave your pardon, sir," she said.

"For what?" asked he.

"For my violent words," she replied, much ashamed. "Since you have already given this letter to Master Falconer, our best friend. And all the truth," she raised her head, "shall now be known."

The General looked at her in silence. Then:

"God keep you, little maid," he said.

His eyes met those of her father, who had come up behind her, and who made now a timid gesture of farewell.

For a moment Cromwell hesitated. Then with a curt salute to the older man, he strode down the steps, and mounted. A second gun fired, and he was gone.

Millicent Arden stood in the doorway while the rebel General rode away—while the last men

of his personal guard formed up behind him, and clattering from the courtyard left it to empty silence—while the long, steely line of the more distant troops rounded the oak-clad knoll and passed wholly out of her view.

A kind of lull was on her.

"All's well," she murmured to herself. "Ned hath the letter."

But even as she said it there came upon her—cold with the shadow of coming ill—the memory of the strange gentleness she had marked in her enemy's voice. What unguessed terrors did Cromwell's pity hint? What needed she of an enemy's kindness? She, who had her own father's care? She turned at that thought to her father. But he had left her. So she went quickly back into the hall in search of him. And—was this her father—this old man sunk down in his chair, with great tears running unheeded down his face?

When she ran to him, calling his name, and put her arms about him, he did not repulse her as she could almost have wished.

No. He only said: "My girl, my girl!" and let his head drop on her shoulder.

"It is your wound," she whispered, heartening him against her own rushing fears. "You are weak from your wound."

"Old and broken. Old and broken," he muttered.

She tried to laugh. "So strong and stern to me," she said, "but now."

She felt her bruised arm burn where he had grasped it. He was strong still—of course he was strong—her father!

"Discipline," he muttered, "discipline"; and rallying to a smile, "Sure I need to be stern," he said, "with a headstrong girl that thrusts her hands among threads she cannot see."

"What threads, dear father?" asked Millicent.

He put his hand upon her head, and looking down at her, he said:

"Threads I wove for thee, little maid, as well as for me—to be the cable of our safety." He sat up. "And will weave again," he said fiercely. "Ay! that I will."

"But, father——" She hesitated—she feared to presume on his indulgent moment. "Not with yonder traitor's help?" she said timidly at last.

"*His* help!" Sir Roger stumbled to his feet with a wild gesture of rage. "Noll Cromwell's help!" he cried.—"He's the very rock that hath cut our cable!"

Sir Roger was glaring at the door by which his conqueror had left him.

"Why, that's my own father," said Millicent, seeking to still by words the shoreless

misgivings of her thoughts. "That's my own father who stands alone and laughs at his foes."

But he turned to her with the new appealing tenderness which made her heart stand still.

"Not alone," he said wistfully. "My little maid must laugh with me."

He took her chin in his hand. "But she's liker weeping, still," he said. "Nay, there's no laughing for me while my little maid weeps."

"We'll laugh together, then"—she tried to say—"some day!"

But she could face it out no longer. It was she now who clung to her father's arm, and looked in her father's face for help.

"There's such a whispering here," she said, "of tears that shall come first."

"A girl's mood," he answered hurriedly, and walked away from her.

"A foolish mood, no more." She fought it sturdily. "And a girl's smiles are every whit as foolish. Not worth thy care, dear father."

He turned in his quick pacing, and stood before her and said:

"And yet, I tell thee, Millicent, of all that's come and gone—that's lost and may be won—there's one thing only holds its place with me, and that's the cheer in my child's eyes; and before I see that light go out——"

"You shall not," she assured him stoutly.

"No," the father answered, and drew his

child's hand within his arm. "For it's thou and I against the world now, little maid. I for thee, and thou for——"

"Ned," breathed the girl, as the door opened. "Here is Ned."

But it was not Ned first came in, though she had been right in knowing his step. He held the door for Mistress Ursula, Joan Arden, and Dr. Bertram, and it was they who closed eagerly about the father and child, while Ned Falconer stood apart, observing them.

What had been said, he asked himself, between these two—so united and so divided? How did the old man think to live out his life under the trusting eyes of his child?

A quick fire of question and answer passed meanwhile in the group about the hearth, Sir Roger only sitting silent in its midst.

Dr. Bertram presently called Falconer to join them.

"Canst tell us, Ned," he asked, "why Noll hath carried with him Cornwallis and Gilbert Lovel?"

"As sureties," answered Ned, "for the rest of us, who may disperse, all, to our homes."

This fresh stroke of clemency stabbed Millicent with a fresh daunting fear.

"Are we helpless, then?" she asked proudly. "Is there no service left that we may do our King?"

"So Cromwell deems it," Falconer answered her.

"But Calthorpe——" began Millicent.

"Will come to-day—to-day," said a voice from the fireside.

All turned and looked at Sir Roger. Surely he had spoken. Yet he sat now unconscious of their eager looks—till Dr. Bertram went to him and asked him directly:

"Have you news of Calthorpe's coming, Roger?"

Then he looked up peevishly.

"News? No. How you talk! But it is time he came. Time. Time."

Dr. Bertram felt the wave of Millicent's disquiet. Now that the strain of the enemy's presence was relaxed, his old friend seemed falling back into the weakness that had followed on yesterday's blow. He must rouse and cheer him, thought Dr. Bertram.

"Come, honoured sir," he said. "We'll watch for Sir Giles Calthorpe through my great glass on the tower."

The three women and Ned cried out to cover the blundering words. But Sir Roger had heard them and staggered to his feet with an oath.

"Wilt talk of thy devil's glass to me?" he cried—and he broke through them all and ran blindly towards his room.

Dr. Bertram followed him, stammering—almost weeping.

"Nay, then, forgive thy foolish old friend. Let me come, Sir Roger. Roger," knocking now upon the door that Sir Roger had flung to and bolted in his face. "Let me come, Roger, and talk of better things."

When Ned Falconer had drawn away his penitent old tutor and was pacing him back into some quiet upon the terrace, Mistress Ursula joined herself to the pair, and Millicent found herself alone with Joan Arden.

"Will you help me, Cousin Joan?" she asked timidly.

The younger girl was halfway to the door, and stopped reluctantly.

"In what?" she asked.

"In this matter of the letter," said Millicent, "since you saw my father seal it up."

"I see nothing," said Joan shortly.

Millicent bit her lip that had uttered the thoughtless phrase.

"I meant," she said, "that you were by."

"I was by. What of that?"

The blind girl still made as if to go; yet lingered still, torn by conflicting wills.

"This," said Millicent. "You can doubtless tell me into whose hands my father gave the letter."

There was a silence. The old rooted grudge

that bade the blind girl be revenged on all the careless folk who slighted her, saw its chance. It was in her power to tell Cousin Millicent that which would kill her arrogant pride for ever. Yet—not that road had Dick taken—her own brother—her own! Nor Ned Falconer—no kinsman of hers, he, yet more dear than any kin. She had promised *him*.

Joan's answer when it came, came brief and dull and tired.

"It was to Ned Falconer mine uncle gave the letter," she said, and said no more.

And: "Only to him? That's well," was all Millicent's answer. But the contentment in her voice was fuse to the sudden blaze of Joan Arden's jealousy.

"All's well with you," she cried, "if Ned Falconer's name be but spoken."

Millicent crimsoned. "You are angry," she murmured.

"You are shameless," said Dick Arden's sister fiercely.

Millicent's breath came fast, but: "I am to follow truth, now," she said, "against shame."

"He that bids you face down shame," panted Joan, "knows how sore you'll need that counsel." Was it herself had let the wild words fly, or the possessing jealous demon?

They struck home. Millicent's heart stopped.

"How I shall need"—she faltered—"shall need to face shame? What do you mean?"

"I may not tell," said Joan. "I may not tell."

Still she was keeping her hands clenched tight upon the bare letter of her word. But the demon whispered: One thing you may tell. And:

"One thing I may tell!" she gladly cried. "For 'tis common talk in Cromwell's camp."

"What is that?" said Millicent, faintly.

"The price," said Joan, "that the traitor's letter asked of Cromwell."

"The price?" echoed Millicent.

"The traitor's price was that this estate of Thirlby should be continued to the Arden line."

"That this estate of Thirlby——" repeated Millicent. She found no clue yet.

And then Joan Arden lost her hold upon the letter of her word.

"And since you know," she cried in triumph, "that my brother did not ask this—what man else but one would choose for the price of his treason a grace for the Arden line?"

A breathless pause—while the blind girl's hearing hung in dread upon the next sound from the heart she had hurt.

It came—the one word: "Insolent!" in a voice of slow, deep scorn.

Then she heard her cousin rise to her feet, and add in cold disdain :

" And blind in heart—to think that because a man would throw away his life for us—he would throw away his honour ! "

" A man," stammered Joan, bewildered. " Who's this you speak of ? A man ? "

" Of Ned Falconer," said Millicent, more proudly still. And on Joan's shrill cry, " Ned Falconer ! " her cousin finished with contempt, " Whom you defame."

" *I !* Defame Ned Falconer ? I ! " cried the blind girl, so whelmed in anger, she did not hear the opening door.

Millicent's next slow words struck her aghast.

" Who comes here in good time to answer you," said Millicent. And Joan knew with despair that it was to Ned Falconer that her cousin turned now.

" Dear kinsman," Millicent said—her disdain for Joan's words was still ringing in her voice—" this frightened child hath heard a tale which it is right that you should hear."

" What's that ? " asked Ned quickly.

" It is common talk," said Millicent, " that the traitor's letter to Cromwell asked reward for *us*—for the Arden line."

Another breathless pause—another agony of dread to the blind girl. Then Ned's voice :

"It was ill done of Joan to carry idle tales."

A stern voice—troubled, too—Joan heard that. She had troubled her one friend. Let the demon give her what joy he could of it.

"But she did well to carry these tales to us," pursued Millicent, "since we can give such idle tales the lie."

"How may we do so, Millicent?" asked Falconer.

"By looking on the letter," she said, "which General Cromwell gave to you."

"Whence had you that?" he asked.

"Why, from my father," said she.

At that, "Leave us, Joan," said Ned Falconer firmly. But he overtook her at the door, and said:

"Your promise, henceforth, Joan."

And she stole away, sobbing, "I will keep it. I will keep it, dear Ned."

CHAPTER XXXI

MILLICENT had never seen Ned Falconer look as he did when he now came back and stood before her.

"This matter must rest here, Millicent," he said sternly. "It is done. One life hath paid for it."

"An innocent life," she threw in.

"And the guilty," said Falconer, "pays dear enough by living."

"Should a murderer live?" she cried.

"You speak of what you know not," he said shortly.

Their eyes met, and she read in his that there was a wall between their minds.

"Are you set to be my foe?" she asked, bewildered. "You speak a tongue that is strange to me. You walk by a light that seems —darkness."

"So it must be," he answered.

"But you will let me look on the letter?" she entreated.

"I cannot."

"Why?" she cried. "Why?"

"The letter is no longer in my keeping."

"No longer in your keeping!" Her breath

failed—" But—but it is not an hour since he gave it you. Gave it you doubtless, here, as you talked."—Then she cried out, " It was not *that* letter you burnt ? Burnt here before my eyes ? "

He was silent. His thought was, " She must know all now. I have failed. I have not hid her father's treason from her."

" It was not that ? " she insisted. She drew near him, imploring his denial. " Not that ! Tell me ! Tell me ! "

" It was that," he answered her.

" You burnt *that* letter," she whispered in horror. " Then—then the impossible is true. . . . It was his," she shuddered. " His that died for it. The letter *was* Dick Arden's."

" No, by Heaven ! " cried Falconer. " The letter was not Dick's."

" You would shield him ? " she quickly said.

" I swear," he told her solemnly, " that Dick Arden had no hand in that letter."

" Why, then," she was piecing it out now quickly—brokenly. " It was not Dick Arden's, as you swear. But the letter then would have cleared him. . . . And you—you have destroyed the thing that would have cleared the innocent dead. . . . But for whose sake ? Whose ? "

She began to tremble in the clutch of an uncomprehended fear.

"Tell me," she begged him urgently and hoarsely, "who is this man you have set yourself to shield? Do not leave me guessing," she panted. "Who—who is there in all this household—that is dearer to you—to me—than the dead?"

He took her hand in his.

"Dear Millicent——" he began.

"Yes, hold me! Help me!" she whispered and clung to his hand. "Do not let the black thought come."

"If my life could keep it from you," he groaned.

"Nay, it doth not ask your life," she sobbed, with a wild fondness. "A word from your lips! I will believe it! I will believe it, dear!" And, looking in his eyes with entreating terror: "That paper"—she hurried on—"that my father gave to you—it passed from your hands to some other, and the other changed it before you gave it to Dick Arden? To some other? To—to—to——why, to old Francis Petre!"

She cried this out suddenly, as one who has found the clue——

"And Colonel Petre changed the letter," she went on. "Yes, yes. An old man. And one, till now, honourable. Nay," she said, "you did well, very well, to shield him, dear. And the traitor was Francis Petre—was he not?" Her eyes implored, commanded his assent. "Old

Francis Petre. You gave the letter to *him?*" She caught his hand, crying, "Speak! Speak! Say yes!"

"No," said Ned Falconer.

"To *whom*, then?"

Like lightning she challenged him.

"To none."

And like one lightning-struck she fell.

It was into the great chair that she fell. She moved once, to hide from the day; and lay still—still and mute—face and hands ground hard against the hard oak. And her lover thought she knew all her father's guilt. And he came and knelt by her to share its weight.

"I will tell you all now, dearest," he said.

But a harsh, sullen muttering answered him. "No. Nothing. I will hear nothing. What should I know of your secrets? I do not know. I will not hear. Nor speak. Dick Arden—What of Dick Arden? Must I speak aloud for his sake every black doubt that visits my heart? Dick Arden's dead. He is dead. No help to him if I did speak."

Her broken anguish broke Ned's heart.

"No help, dear," he echoed. "Dick is dead. And the living will repent."

With an inarticulate sound of disgust she sprang to her feet, pushing him from her.

"Millicent!" he cried, amazed.

"You!" she wailed, "who spoke truth to my heart! Is it *you* seek now to strengthen it in lies?"

"Millicent!" he repeated.

She caught his hand again.

"No, no," she said. "You would have confessed."

"Confessed!" It was he that withdrew now.

"Yes. You would have confessed all the truth," she said. "You love truth! It is I that am too weak to hear it!"

"To *hear what?*" he demanded. He came back and faced her fiercely. "Millicent! You think——"

"Nothing, nothing."

The hurried muttering broke forth again. She stood under his stern, questioning eyes, and would not meet them. Her own eyes sought the ground. Her hands clasped and unclasped each other hurriedly. She laughed a light, dead little laugh.

"If the letter came through your hands," she said, "did it not come also through my father's? Do I think black thoughts of my father? Do I fear," she asked (and now, once, her despairing eyes met Ned's), "fear—*fear*," she whispered under her breath, "lest I shall cry out *his* secret in my sleep?"

Then Falconer knew that it was himself she doubted. And in part he understood. He understood that she could not doubt the father whom she loved. But he thought too that she did not love the lover whom she doubted. And in that moment, almost, for her sake and his old Captain's, Ned Falconer could have wished himself. the traitor.

"No. No." He spoke slowly, without anger, as without hope. "Your father you could not doubt. You love him. And, therefore——"

"Therefore——" She stopped him, breathless. "I have a mind that cannot deal with such matters, as you see. Do not tell them to me! Do not!"

"What should I tell her, indeed?" was the thought of the man she was leaving desolate.

But even while he thought it, Millicent Arden's bruised love sprang up to its new life: full-grown now: careless now of pain and shame. She turned back to him with a look that threw wide to him the doors of a helping heart, and, as he beheld the change with wonder, she said gently, "Yet, if truth be your heart's need—*tell* me."

What tumult was this that had grown round about them while they talked, and now burst in upon them? The women, the servants, the maimed remnants of the garrison, running from

the inner doors; Sir Roger from his tower-chamber; and in the great outer door, swinging back, one proud armed figure, behind whom more and more thronged in and filled the court with clamour.

"Sir Roger Arden!" It was Sir Giles Calthorpe who shouted, white with rage. His sword was in his hand, his great plumed hat thrust down upon his brows. "What's this I find? Ruined walls! A tale of treason!—All the garrison under arrest!"

The surge of welcome that was breaking from that brave handful of the defence died down to a proud silence. A file of the comrades who had ridden night and day to their deliverance marched in and ranged themselves each beside his prisoner.

Ned Falconer had gripped Joan Arden's arm, with the quick word, "Your promise!" But his eyes were not on Joan.

His eyes were on Millicent, and hers on him; till Calthorpe's next words rang out:

"The women, too, as witnesses!"

And the guards shut them from each other's sight.

CHAPTER XXXII

SIR GILES CALTHORPE had been better than his word. For whereas he had promised Thirlby House (and his old friend Roger) relief within two days—only one day had passed when he galloped round Four Elms Hill, and sighted, where he had looked to see the investing rebel force, an empty, far-stretching valley. In headlong dismay he had ridden through Cromwell's forsaken earthworks—to draw rein at last among the medley of broken stones which had been yesterday the chief stronghold of King Charles.

The fury that blazed from him, as the old old steward's stammered word, "Treason," reached his ears, was instant, and was mastered instantly.

The prisoners were removed. Sir Giles Calthorpe withdrew to confer behind closed doors with his old comrade Sir Roger Arden. And there followed, for the soldiers of the baffled relieving force, hours of waiting which added fuel to their rage.

But Sir Giles Calthorpe's soldiers could wait. They knew their leader. Brave men robbed of victory by treason—adventurers maddened by unsuccess—they waited all in a like fierce

confidence. They had no fear, as the hours passed by, that time was wasting, or that Calthorpe would be baulked of his revenge.

And when the dark fell, Calthorpe was ready.

Lights flared along the walls of the hall of Thirlby House; the heavy oak table was set, as if in state, upon the dais before the east window; and the place was thronged, every foot of it—floor, stairs, and gallery—by war-worn soldiers of King Charles. But among these Cavaliers, these angry, eager, hot-eyed men, who jostled and whispered and surmised, not one was to be seen of those familiar faces on whom the Arden portraits were used to look down. For all Thirlby's late defenders (with the single exception of her Captain) lay under suspicion of an infamy, and it was for the hunting out and branding of the traitor in her garrison that the lights flared and the table was set.

Time was short.

The desperate push that Sir Giles Calthorpe had made demanded a halt of some few hours. But the King's service was now of such urgency that (this breathing-space once past) not a moment would be spared from present needs for past misdoings. And the whole expectant, savage concourse of disappointed men knew that Calthorpe's work of vengeance,

to be done at all, must needs be done to-night.

There was a suddenly increased murmur in the hall, a swaying in the crowd, and then a hush.

A door on the tower-stair had opened, and this told the impatient crowd that the preliminary conference had come to an end at last.

They were coming—Sir Giles Calthorpe, the baulked commander of the relieving force, and Sir Roger Arden, the doubly-wronged, the master of Thirlby, and captain of her gallant defence.

Amid a dead silence the officers entered who were to preside at the Court of Inquiry.

Crawshay, Dacre, Thorpe, Bingham (a younger son of Ned Falconer's old master), came first, and took their places behind the long table.

Then a pause. Then Sir Giles Calthorpe lounged in, motioning Sir Roger Arden to the place of honour on his right. And those of Calthorpe's men who knew their wild leader best—in all his moods—laughing and lazy—alert and furious—thought worst of that traitor's chances of escape who was to meet Sir Giles to-night with his air of cold indifference upon him.

Sir Giles Calthorpe glanced round him as he drew in his chair to the centre of the table, spoke a laughing word to his old friend Roger, then nodded to an officer :

"Bring in the prisoners. Stay!"

He drew out a paper, and spread it out upon the table between himself and Sir Roger Arden. He glanced down the list.

"Not the women," he said, "nor yet the troopers. Bring—let me see. Bring Bertram, Falconer, Mainwaring, Jessop, Jerningham. No more yet. 'Tis pity Francis Petre's old wits are still wandering," he said, turning to Sir Roger as the officer went out. "He would have helped us here."

Sir Roger Arden demurred.

"Francis Petre's hands," he said, "were ever better than his head."

"His heart is better than both," said Calthorpe, carelessly. "And somehow—I know not how—a good stomach for a fight carries often with it a good nose for a traitor."

He beckoned another soldier.

"Bring in also that rebel cur that we nabbed upon the march. A good catch, Roger, this Roundhead. Yes," in answer to a watchful question in Sir Roger's eyes, "one that hath news for us on this matter, I warrant you."

Sir Roger Arden looked as if about to ask more, but a bearing back of the crowd and a hushing breath that came from it, marked the coming of the first batch of accused men.

Their road led them before the table, and each, as he passed, saluted Sir Giles Calthorpe,

who acknowledged the salute with courtesy. The prisoners were placed in a little group below the stair-foot, and, at Calthorpe's order, were given a wooden bench to sit on.

Dr. Bertram, however, declined it, stepping suddenly out to the centre of the hall, and beginning very firmly :

" Sir Giles Calthorpe—I must protest——"

" Never protest, parson." Calthorpe's great voice overpowered his. " Sir Roger, I'll swear it, hath a true-blue Church-and-State man to chaplain him. And Passive Obedience is the only word for such to-day. But sit, reverend sir. And, gentlemen, be seated all. I have good hope that your detention will be as short as it is formal. Who's yonder stripling," he asked Sir Roger, " carries his sword-arm in a sling ? I'll swear his face is known to me."

" He is my ward and nephew, Ned Falconer," said Sir Roger Arden.

" Falconer ? " cried Calthorpe. " Ah ! now I have it. He came to me on his road to this place, and I gave him a letter for you ; but told him he'd never make his way into Thirlby House through Hales's lines. He disproved me, as it seems."

" Ay. He made his way in most hardily," said Crawshay, on Calthorpe's left. " And yesterday, when Dick fell, young Falconer held the place like twelve demons, so they say."

"A formal matter, Captain Falconer, this first inquiry." Calthorpe leaned forward and addressed the young man very cordially. "It is my hope to ask you shortly to shift your place and join us here."

Falconer bowed in silence, and Calthorpe turned swiftly to confront the Roundhead prisoner, who had been brought in during this talk and now stood firm and square before the chimney-piece, surveying his judges.

"Now you, sirrah, your name?"

"Thankful John Bennett," said the old soldier.

"Thankful John, thou hadst that name in foreknowledge of this day's good luck. For whereas hanging is the best of thy knavish deserts, it falls out so, that thy truthful witness in this matter may avail to save thy neck."

"I can betray no secrets, sir," said Bennett very composedly, "since I know none. And if the truth will save my life, I will save it, as you say, thankfully."

Old Bennett had been seized on his way from General Cromwell to Colonel Hammond. He knew his errand to be urgent. He thought without ceasing of the hole in the hedge into which (when he heard the hoofs of Calthorpe's horse) he had thrust his General's letter. And he thanked Heaven for this: that he had his

memory still, and would know that hole in the hedge when he saw it again.

"A sturdy clown," said Sir Roger Arden, with a furtive, uneasy look at the witness.

"And a trusty, as I think," said Calthorpe. "Mark him well. Now, tell this Court, Thankful John, what you have told me, of how the order was given by Noll Cromwell to storm this house."

"Yesterday morning, sirs,"—Bennett spoke with deliberation, leisurely but respectful,—"we thought, all of us, yesterday morning, to sit another week before this place. For we were without fit instruments for battery, our great mortar-piece being lost, and our light guns, by an unhappy accident, not yet come from Bristol. And, moreover," he added grimly, "the most worshipful Council of State had furnished us with scaling ladders all too short for service. But at two of the clock there came out to us, from the house, a youth bearing a letter, which letter I carried to General Cromwell; who looked upon it, and forthwith sent for that youth, and set him with his back to the wall, and shot him. And——"

His voice was drowned by a groan from the onlookers, among whom Dick Arden had many comrades and not one ill-wisher. And before he could resume:

"Stay—stay," said Calthorpe, and turned

formally to Sir Roger. "How came it, Sir Roger Arden, that your nephew could leave these walls unknown to you?"

Sir Roger lifted his eyes from the table, looked straight before him, and spoke in a voice which, to his friend, had the tonelessness of hopeless grief:

"He left these walls with my knowledge, Sir Giles, carrying a despatch superscribed by myself to you, that implored your instant aid."

Then Falconer eagerly broke silence:

"At his deadly peril, Sir Giles Calthorpe. A glorious peril which Dick Arden craved as a boon."

"*He* craved it," said Calthorpe. "He only?"

"No, no, Falconer himself would have gone."

Mainwaring and Jessop cried this out together. For their hearts were knit to Ned, since he had led them to the fight of yesterday.

"I divined as much," said Calthorpe, looking kindly on Falconer. "But what I cannot divine," he added, turning to Sir Roger, "is your reason—why you should refuse young Falconer, and expose Dick Arden, your heir. Why was this? All silent?" He looked at the group of prisoners. "Yet all," he said, "have a look to know."

Falconer stood up.

"I was refused, sir," he said, "and Dick Arden sent, for the reason that, in the great sortie, I had turned my back upon the enemy."

"You?" cried Calthorpe, amazed.

Then, as he looked again at Falconer's colourless face, a distrust of him began to stir.

"Sit down," he said curtly, and turned to Bennett. "Proceed, sirrah."

Bennett resumed: "In the self-same moment, then, that young Arden fell and died, our General called upon us to assault and carry this place by sundown—though the ladders, he said, should be our bodies and the battering instruments our skulls. For, said he, the letter the traitor brought held a promise of quick relief to the garrison, by which token there was laid upon our shoulders at that time the whole cause of the suffering saints. So he spoke, and so we heard him, and thereupon—why, truly, I believe there hath seldom been the like cheerfulness to any work like to this, once it was resolved upon."

Bennett's voice, raised to a chant, suddenly dropped. His eye was caught by the little knot of disarmed men, sitting motionless under suspicion—those men who had kept even his great General at bay. A slow, shamed redness rose to his brow.

"More I will not say," he muttered, "in the presence of brave men, who deserved a better cause."

"You hear him, gentlemen," Calthorpe briskly took up the word. "And you hear that the instant assault and loss of this place came directly of that treason which carried my letter to the enemy."

"Ay, ay," said Dacre and the rest; and their assent was echoed by the onlookers with a groan.

"Which letter of yours, Sir Giles," Sir Roger Arden spoke courteously, "was doubtless intended by you for my hands?"

"Ay," said Calthorpe, "and which same letter did safely reach this house, as shall be proved."

Sir Roger stirred in his chair.

"Nay, nay," he muttered. "But can you prove that? Then I see no way——"

"No way to clear thine unhappy nephew," said Calthorpe, "as I fear!"

Sir Roger drew a deep breath. "Is it even so?" he said.

"For there is one other thing this fellow testifies," said Calthorpe. "Come, John, what heard you of the traitor's offer, further than you have yet declared?"

"Only this," said Bennett. "It was said our General shot the young man, for the reason

that he would have sold him this place by night, at a price——" he paused.

"Name the price," said Calthorpe.

Bennett reflected. It was in no way to his liking to be bearing witness against the dead. But he thought of the hole in the hedge, and his General's urgent errand yet undone, and he spoke.

"The price named in the letter," he said, with reluctance, "was the securing of these estates to the Arden line."

"Black liar that thou art!" shouted Sir Roger Arden; while the sound of dismay from the rest would have drowned any cry less violent than his.

Calthorpe looked at him, pitying him. If indeed the price asked was a boon to the Ardens, who could have asked it but Dick? And that rascally Dick had been honest Roger's nephew, and his daughter's betrothed, moreover.

"Patience, old friend," he said. "Patience! 'Tis rumour yet, unproven rumour—this price the fellow tells of."

"That's as may be," said Bennett, obstinately. "You have but to look on the letter and you shall know what price the traitor asked."

"Look on the letter! Thou saucy knave!" cried Calthorpe.

But Bennett's stubbornness was fully roused.

"Ay, ay," he said. "Look on the traitor's letter with the great red seal. The letter that General Cromwell gave back this day to you—to—to"—he looked about him—"to one of you. To you? No," this to Mainwaring. He looked round him searchingly. "Ha! Yes!" he cried out suddenly. "To *you* there! You with the broke right arm!"

There was a sound through the Court as of a wind through the trees, as every man turned and looked on Falconer. Not a man doubted Bennett's words who saw the young man's withered aspect. His fellow-prisoners looked, and drew away from the drawn, still face. Dr. Bertram looked, in growing horror, as a mother might upon a changeling child. Only Sir Roger Arden sat back, white and rigid, in his chair, clutched the table with two shaking hands, and did not lift his eyes and look, as this new cloud passed on his house's honour.

Calthorpe, looking, for his part, very coolly and very deliberately, took his own time with the white-faced boy; observed him, smiled at him coldly, then called on him by name:

"Captain Falconer."

Ned Falconer stood up

"You have heard the witness. Had you any speech to-day with the rebel General?"

"I had," answered Falconer. And the sound that was breaking from Sir Roger Arden

as if to warn him to silence, died in a stifled groan.

"To what purpose, Captain Falconer?" asked Calthorpe, negligently.

There was a pause.

"I cannot answer that question," said Falconer; and through the smothered movement of suspicion that followed the words, he added, simply, "It was a matter private between him and me."

It seemed that Sir Roger Arden's great heart could not leave his wretched kinsman undefended. He broke in passionately:

"Calthorpe! In justice to my nephew—ask yourself! Is it a likely tale this Roundhead tells? Would Cromwell bestow precious evidence upon his enemy? Upon the very man who had most desperately withstood him?"

The appeal was well chosen. It brought back to Calthorpe his earlier, better thought of Falconer. He observed the stillness of the accused more closely, and was less sure that it meant shame.

"No," he said, after a moment. "It is *not* like." And he turned to the witness Bennett. "Thou heapest up palpable lies, sirrah, in the hope to buy thy safety."

Bennett's blood was up.

"I say the truth," he said, "and that young man knows it. And as regards likelihood of

saw the young man hol
great red seal in his ha
thank the General for it

Bennett folded his
Falconer full in the face.

"Ned!" Sir Roger
kinsman yet. His voic
across the Court, as fro
"Ned! 'Tis a rascal's w
more—one that writhes
the halter. *Answer him.*

"Ay, answer me," sa
lied?"

The answer came slo
weary:

"He hath not lied.
General Cromwell."

In the hush that rece
crowd's eyes were on th
ferred in whispers for a w

"Captain Falconer," said Calthorpe, "this Court desires that you produce this red-sealed paper."

"I cannot," said Falconer.

Sir Roger's head dropped upon his hands.

Calthorpe spoke again.

"This Court calls upon you, Captain Falconer, upon your allegiance, to produce this paper."

"I—cannot, sir."

The prisoner's refusal had no defiance; but rather a courteous, a hesitating reluctance.

The judges conferred again, and a stir and rustle relaxed the tension in the crowd. The judges were speaking to Sir Roger now; they were urging something on Sir Roger. And a sound of sympathy was followed by instant stillness, when it was seen that Sir Roger was getting to his feet.

Holding by the table, and gazing strangely at his nephew, he spoke in a strangled voice:

"Ned Falconer," he said, "it is laid upon me by this Court: as your kinsman, to entreat, as your late captain, to command——"

He passed his hand over his head, as seeking words, and murmurs of sympathy were heard again.

"To command," he resumed, more strongly now, "to command, I say, for the last time,

that you put into evidence the paper you received this day from General Cromwell."

The old man could stand yet, but he swayed as he stood.

"Kinsman and captain," Falconer answered slowly, and if his voice before had courtesy, it had now some deeper thing, "it is impossible for me to produce that paper."

"Impossible?" gasped Sir Roger. And all the Court leaned for Falconer's next words.

"I have destroyed the paper," he said.

A long, low hiss ran round the Court. Sir Roger Arden fell back in his chair. Many crowded towards him in pity. All withdrew from Falconer.

Calthorpe spoke in his sharpest, most matter-of-fact voice.

"Release the witness."

Bennett walked forthwith straight out of the hall and away.

"Call the next witness: John Stubbs."

A soldier left the hall.

A low growl of satisfaction greeted Calthorpe's next command:

"Remove Edward Falconer, accused of high treason, from among those gentlemen, and place him before the Court under guard."

CHAPTER XXXIII

It was done. Ned Falconer stood now before the great chimney-piece, where Bennett had stood before, and a King's soldier guarded him on either hand. And the best that could be done for him by the knot of men below the stair who had been his comrades was to turn their eyes steadily from his face.

What were the thoughts behind that still face? Not the whirling, forecasting thoughts that had brought the raw soldier with a whole skin out of his first fight. Perhaps he did not think at all. Perhaps a man in such a case only thanks God that duty is inevitable now.

"John Stubbs."

Sir Giles Calthorpe addressed the frightened country fellow who was staring open-mouthed at that dangerous row of judges in face of whom he had been set.

"I gave thee a letter to be delivered into Sir Roger Arden's hands, and I swore thee that no eyes but thine and his should look upon that letter. Didst perform thine errand?"

"Ay, sir, ay," stammered Stubbs; "and yet, again, no!"

"No?" said Calthorpe, fiercely.

"Please your honour's grace," said the trembling witness, "I could not give that letter to his worship's honour's own hands, seeing that the soldier that was head of 'em all at the gate-house—he nosed treason, the wary knave, and would not let a true man in."

"Do you see this officer you speak of here present?" asked Calthorpe.

Stubbs first stared hard (as appeared to him only respectful) at Calthorpe himself and at the other judges. Then he surveyed the men in the gallery, those on the stairs, and the group of the accused at the stair-foot, making many a false start as he looked; till at last he was nearly turned about to the point of view from which he started.

"No," he said. "No—Ay!—No, no. Ay," he cried, with an exultant start. "There he is, sure! There he is, sure! *Him* there! With his arm in a scarf!"

The roar of hatred that burst out at this new and independent recognition of Falconer was silenced instantly by Calthorpe, who addressed the smiling witness in a voice that froze his triumph into fear:

"You gave my letter to that gentleman and betrayed your oath to me?"

"No, no, sir, not so fast," gasped the wretched John Stubbs. "Fair and soft. I

did not so. But I told him my oath, that no eye but mine must look upon that letter. And he promised me he'd save my scruples, and he'd send and fetch a young gentlewoman of the house—one that was blind. And so they fetched her, your honour, and blind she was, as was plain to see. And to her I gave the letter, that she should carry it to the captain. And when the men at the gate relaxed their watch upon me—I being in mortal fear of them all, see you—I fled from the deep sea to the devil—and so fell in with your honour's grace."

"Who is this blind woman?" asked Calthorpe quickly.

"A child—no more," Sir Roger answered, quicker still. "My niece Joan, sister to Dick Arden, and distraught with grief at his death."

"Call Joan Arden," said Calthorpe.

Sir Roger interposed, much agitated:

"Stay. Spare her, Calthorpe. Spare the maid. Do not expose her calamity to this assembly. They tell me she is beside herself since her arrest this morning, and speaks she knows not what."

"Call Joan Arden," Calthorpe repeated; and while an officer went out by the north door, "Your pardon, old friend," he said, firmly; "but we must needs have the poor maid before us, and pluck from her ravings, if we can, into whose hands she gave this letter."

"She is distraught. You will see it," Sir Roger urged still.

His words were heard clear in the hushed Court; and when the officer returned, bringing with him the old knight's blind niece, and another, older woman, to whom she clung, the young girl drew away the attention of many—even from the prisoner.

Not Calthorpe's, however. He made watchful note of the pitying kindness with which Falconer regarded the new witness.

Indeed, the young blind girl's case was pitiful enough.

She was shivering with fear, and repeated continually to herself the same low muttered words, as if they had been a charm against her fear.

"I will use her with gentleness," said Calthorpe to Sir Roger, who, however, had not spoken. It was his disquiet of manner that Calthorpe sought to soothe. He then bade the guard separate the girl from Mistress Ursula Tuddenham, and place her with her back to the stair, where she was full in face of the prisoner, but with the breadth of the hall between them.

"Mistress Joan Arden," he asked, after a pause, in a voice that might have seemed kind to ears less wise than the blind girl's, "do you know where you stand now?"

"In the Court," she said, faintly, "the Court—of inquiry—so said the soldier."

"Why, that's well," the smooth voice answered. "And before whom?"

"I cannot tell. . . . Your voice is strange. . . . All else is still. I am alone."

But as she spoke, there came to her ears, low, but distinct, the single word, "Remember."

And thrilled with life and joy, she whispered, "No. I am not alone."

"Whose voice was that?" shouted Calthorpe. "Who spoke?"

"No one. I heard nothing." The disclaimer came from all.

"Someone said 'Remember,'" insisted Sir Giles Calthorpe, furious now. "The witness heard it! Look at her face."

And, indeed, the blind girl's face was all alight.

"Who spoke to you, mistress?" he demanded, and his eyes went from her to the prisoner.

"I—cannot tell," faltered the girl, and clasped her hands together.

"Have a care, mistress." There was no pretence now at gentleness in Calthorpe. "You stand before an officer of the King; to answer truth, and *all* the truth, on a matter that concerns the King. A matter on which, with or

without your help, the truth will soon and certainly be known."

"An officer of the King?" said the girl.

"Sir Giles Calthorpe by name," said he.

She cried out in terror. "Calthorpe!—Of the Wreathed Dagger!"

He smiled. "You know my seal?" he said. He could speak coolly again now—now the witness had begun to speak. "And how comes that?"

"I . . . cannot tell," she answered, stupidly.

"You may see her brain is mazed." Sir Roger's gesture spoke this to Calthorpe. But Calthorpe, smiling still, said: "I will be sure of that."

He beckoned John Stubbs to him, and gave him some whispered instruction, and signed to his fellow-judges to keep a close watch on the girl's face.

John Stubbs stood forward and sang out lustily. "Safe into Sir Roger's hands that letter must go, young mistress!"

The girl gave a shuddering start, and stifled a cry.

"You saw her?" said Calthorpe to his fellows. Then he turned to the girl.

"We need not ask you, Mistress Joan, whether you know those words. When and where did you hear them last?"

"I—cannot tell," said Joan Arden.

"Nay, then, I'll tell you." That dreadful voice sought to make itself smooth and seeming-friendly to her again. "'Twas no further back than yesterday, when this messenger of mine gave you the despatch that bore the seal of the Wreathed Dagger." He broke off, as he marked an instinctive movement of the girl's hands. "A seal," he said to the others, "that her clever fingers have not forgot. See how she followed me! Which same despatch, Mistress Joan, you carried to—to——. To *whom?*"

The question came like a quick blow. The girl shook under it, half spoke, stopped short, and said again, brokenly, "I—cannot tell."

An angry murmur rose in the Court.

"She is obstinate," said Calthorpe.

"She is mad," said Sir Roger Arden. "Mark how she mutters to herself."

"What's that she says, Hawkins?" Sir Giles Calthorpe asked of her guard.

"Ever the same words over," the soldier answered. "'*We must not speak—we must not think—the thing that must not be.*'"

Sir Giles Calthorpe was watching Falconer's face.

"He knows those words," he said, in a lowered voice, to Crawshay. "There is an understanding between this girl and the prisoner."

"The girl is mad, I tell you," persisted Sir

Roger Arden. "Let her go. You'll get naught from her to your purpose."

"And is all forgot?" said Sir Giles Calthorpe, gently. "All that hath chanced these sad days, Mistress Joan? Even that which kind Ned Falconer bade thee remember?"

"Ah! No!" said Joan simply.

"She hath confessed it! Hear her!" cried Calthorpe.

He started to his feet in exultation.

"She hath confessed that Falconer spoke to her."

"No, no!" screamed the blind girl, wildly. "He said nothing. I did not hear! It was not he!"

"Remove the witness," said Calthorpe, cold and stern. "She hath been tampered with by the accused."

"The accused," shrieked the girl. "Ned! Ned! Are *you* the accused?"

"Silence her," said Calthorpe.

"They are trying Ned Falconer!" She fought hard against the gag. "And it was not he! I gave the letter—I gave—gave it—gave——"

She was gagged. But the men who had done it sickened at it. She moaned so, and wrung entreating hands.

"Remove her," said Calthorpe.

"And in good time," cried Ursula Tudden-

ham, stepping out and folding her arms about the shuddering girl. "Shame on you all! Gentlemen, forsooth, if you claim not to be Christians! Snaring a helpless creature in the dark, that she may send her kinsman to his death!"

But at that word—death—such a despair made itself seen in the girl that Calthorpe changed his intention.

"Leave her," he said coldly. "We will keep her here under observation. Her tongue lies; but her face speaks true."

"You will keep her here in torture! Brute!" Ned Falconer cried out, beside himself with anger. "Brute! Devil!"

If his guards had not seized him at the first movement, it seemed that he would have thrown himself on Calthorpe.

Sir Giles smiled, as he coldly ordered, "Silence."

But that, too, was disregarded by the maddened prisoner.

As the girl moaned, and flung out to him hands that seemed to pray his pardon, he called to her with a sob:

"Nay, Joan, all's well. You have done well, dear maid—no ill. You have done all as I would have it. Dear little maid, I thank you."

"We will not gag the prisoner," said Calthorpe, grimly. "His speech is much to our purpose."

Then he turned to his fellow-judges.

"Gentlemen, you have heard the evidence. The messenger, John Stubbs, tells us that Captain Falconer refused him access to Sir Roger Arden, and caused him to entrust instead my letter into the hands of Mistress Joan. Mistress Joan Arden, brought before you, shows herself the manifest tool of the prisoner, who hath the hardihood to direct her evidence even in the open Court. Under his orders, she is obstinate in refusing to name the man to whom she gave the letter; of which letter we know further that it never reached Sir Roger Arden, but was delivered to Noll Cromwell, together with the offer to sell him this place, by the hands of Richard Arden, now dead. All this is proved."

The judges concurred in assent, Sir Roger Arden alone maintaining silence.

"Next," said Calthorpe, "the witness Bennett, who hath had handling of my letter, declares that he saw the prisoner, Falconer, receive it back this morning from General Cromwell, as the reward of saving that black villain's life."

There were groans on this, which dropped to expectant silence as Falconer's captain spoke up for him again.

"I call upon the Court to take notice," said Sir Roger Arden slowly, "that this last is

conjecture, not evidence. We have no proof of the contents of the paper given this morning to the accused by General Cromwell."

"True," answered Calthorpe, promptly. "And for that reason, we called upon Captain Falconer to produce the paper and to clear up this point, if he could. With what result you know."

"Ay, ay," said his judges—and muttered cries of "Traitor! Traitor!" broke from among the crowd.

"Can anyone," Calthorpe resumed, "set down the prisoner's obstinate silence on this point to aught save the consciousness of guilt?"

"I can," said Sir Roger Arden.

The prisoner started violently. The look he bent on his kind kinsman was strange. Less of gratitude it seemed to be—than of a passionate, expectant reverence.

"The Court will hear you," said Calthorpe to Sir Roger.

The old man took his uphill task with visible effort. He spoke with hesitation.

"It may be," he said, "that Captain Falconer keeps silence with intent to shield another man."

Falconer's guards heard the deep breath of wonder, of suspense, that the prisoner drew.

But a burst of laughter broke from the bystanders, and even Calthorpe could not

perfectly cover his smile, as he turned with attempted deference to his old friend.

"Good, worthy Sir Roger!" said he. "And who should he be? This traitor for whom a true man wills to die?"

"Who?" Sir Roger spoke slowly, and it seemed that his look entreated Falconer's. "Why—who but"—Falconer advanced a step—"who but—he that's *dead*," ended the old man—"Dick Arden."

The laughter now in the Court was mixed with contempt. But there was a colder disdain in Falconer's voice, as he said very distinctly:

"I entirely renounce the line of defence which Sir Roger Arden now sets up."

"You do very shrewdly, sir," sneered Calthorpe.

He turned to the others.

"Gentlemen," he said, "Sir Roger Arden asks us to believe that Captain Falconer, knowing Dick Arden to be a traitor, and to have suffered the just penalty of his crime, hath a mind to follow him to his grave from sheer good-fellowship."

"And yet," Sir Roger persisted doggedly, amid murmurs of dissent, "yet I would have the Court observe, that amid many surmises, the stolen despatch hath been certainly traced to one person's hands alone—beside my niece Joan, here—that is, to her brother Richard."

Falconer made a movement of disgust.

"This is true," answered Sir Giles Calthorpe, "and this weighs heavily on Richard Arden, as on an accomplice."

And then it seemed for one moment that the prisoner, Falconer, was about to break his stubborn silence, but Dr. Bertram was beforehand with him in the same cause.

"Sir," the old chaplain spoke very earnestly, and rose from his chair, "I have a word to speak on behalf of the dead. I would stake my life—I speak it in soberness—that Dick Arden knew no treason, but that Sir Roger's despatch was stolen from him and the traitor's letter put in its place."

"Ah!" said Calthorpe, "how do you show that?"

"I watched Dick, Sir Giles, through my great glass from the tower. I saw him drop from the wall, make his way towards cover, and there stand and open his packet. Then, as with a changed purpose, he turned, and made straight for the rebel camp. I could swear that his packet of instructions had been changed."

This witness gave great hope to Dick Arden's many friends, and Calthorpe seized on it instantly as of moment.

"Can any say," he asked quickly, "who had speech last of Dick Arden; or if any had speech of him since his parting from Sir Roger?"

The guards heard their prisoner breathe hard once more, as in dread.

Calthorpe looked at the men of the garrison.

"Can any speak to this?" he asked again.

Mainwaring rose to his feet.

"I can," he said. "The last, sir, who held speech with Dick in life, was his cousin and betrothed, Mistress Millicent Arden."

"No, no! Not she," cried out her father.

Calthorpe smiled.

"Good Sir Roger," he said. "Such a meeting might well be, and a father never know it."

Mainwaring held his ground, respectful, but firm.

"I say true, sir. I was in the courtyard, when Dick flung that great door wide, crying, 'Farewell!' to his lady as he went. And so sped by me to the wall. It was surely with her that he spoke last. And Sir Roger could not know. He had passed to the gate-house full ten minutes before Dick parted from Mistress Millicent."

"Call Millicent Arden," said Calthorpe.

The guards heard no sound more from their prisoner—saw no movement. But there was that in his dead stillness now that so drew to him their whole attention that they had no eyes for who came else.

The word was passed from one soldier to

another, up the stair, and to Mistress Millicent's door.

"I protest, Sir Giles Calthorpe," said Sir Roger Arden, fiercely, "against this practising upon weak women."

"Your protest is natural," answered Calthorpe, steadily. "It is overruled."

Millicent Arden came out of her room and down the stair. She was all white, face and dress. When she came to the lowest step of the stair, straight opposite to Falconer, she stopped, lifted her head, looked him full in the face, and was still. And when the prisoner read that look there took place in him a change—the guards knew not what it was—but it broke the cord that had held them bound to his silent agony, and they, too, could turn and look, and breathe free.

For that was the third, the crowning, moment in the history of Ned Falconer's love.

"Mistress Millicent Arden," said Sir Giles Calthorpe, very courteously, "I grieve to break in upon your grief. Yet it may be that this examination shall tend to your comfort. Your betrothed suffered yesterday for a crime——"

"Of which he was innocent," the girl interposed in a low, steady voice.

"That is as shall appear," said Calthorpe. "You are summoned before this Court, to answer all that I shall ask you faithfully. So

doing it may be you shall clear the honour of the man you love."

"May God grant it!" said Millicent Arden. She spoke always with the same quietness, and her eyes never left the prisoner's.

"But in any case——" Calthorpe resumed.

"In any case," she said, "a light hath shined in the thick confusion of my thoughts. He is innocent—the man I love. I am assured of it."

—Had the prisoner moved—that his guards were drawn to look back at him suddenly?—

No. He stood still as ever, his eyes on the witness's face—where there dawned a smile more tender, more touching, than tears, as she ended:

"And I will set no device of mine between him and his Defender."

"Well spoken," said Calthorpe, briskly.

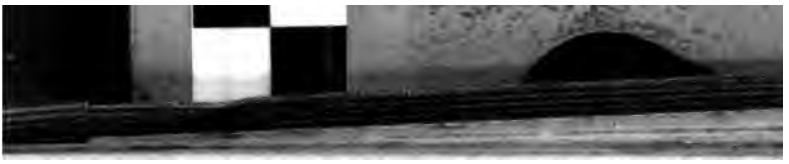
He sought to throw off a feeling strange to him—a consciousness that he was dealing with things beyond his grasp.

"Tell this Court, then," he said. "Had you any speech of him yesterday?"

"Speech of——" The girl, paused, in doubt.

"Why! Of Dick Arden," answered Calthorpe. "Who else?"

"I crave pardon," she said. "Yes, I had speech of Dick Arden yesterday."



"After he had received your father's despatch?"

"Yes," she answered.

Calthorpe smiled at the girl's father.

"You see, Roger?"

He turned to the witness again.

"You were not present, however, at the time when Dick Arden received your father's despatch?"

She paused. It was clear she was striving to answer with strict truth.

"I was present," she said.

"What?" cried Calthorpe, taken aback. "Present then? And your father did not know it?"

She frowned, as if perplexed.

"No," she said, wondering. "My father did not know it."

Calthorpe's laugh rang out, but few were disposed to join with him. The girl's look of care held their eyes.

"Better and better!" cried Calthorpe. "Good Sir Roger! Love will find out the way!" The girl provoked him by the uncomprehending look with which she met his jest. He was wont to have his laugh out whenever he chose.

"You remained hid, then," he said, rudely, "as I may guess, till you saw your father go; and when he went, you spoke with Dick Arden."

"No," she said. Her brows were knit, her hands clasped tightly. "No, sir. I did not say that."

"No? H'm." Sir Giles let his jest go, needing all his mind now for his work. He flung himself back in his chair, but watched the witness narrowly.

"Go on," he said. "Tell the Court all that befell."

"Very little," Millicent Arden, said, simply. "My cousin took the despatch, bade me forthwith farewell, and left me."

"Ha!" said Calthorpe, carelessly. "And by what way?"

"By yonder door."

Calthorpe sat up.

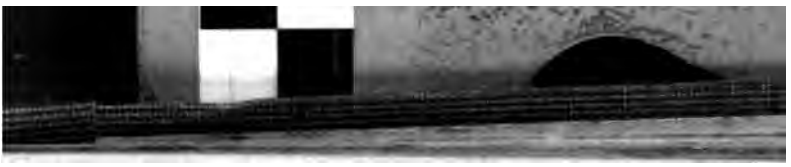
"Mistress Millicent Arden," he said, "a witness hath sworn that when Dick Arden bade you farewell at that door, *your father was full ten minutes gone* to the gate-house."

"That may be," she said, and looked at him, surprised.

"Yet now you say," said Calthorpe, "that Dick Arden bade you farewell in your father's presence."

"No." The witness began to show much distress. "Not in my father's presence."

"Not?" Calthorpe's voice was low and threatening, as he repeated, "Your father was not present at your farewell?"



"No," she answered, trembling.

"Have a care, Mistress Millicent. For the last time. Now! Your father was not present when Dick Arden bade farewell?"

"No." It was only a whisper now, but clear.

"He was not present? Yet you said he had not left you?"

"He had not left us."

"Not present. And not left you—Why! Then your father had never been with you?"

"My father had never been with us." Fainter and fainter came the words.

"But you said that you saw Dick Arden take the despatch from your father?"

There was a silence.

"No," said the faint, clear voice. "No, sir. I did not say that."

"You did *not* see Dick Arden take the despatch from your father?"

"No."

"Death and—Ha! No!" cried Calthorpe, joyfully. "I see daylight!"

He leaned aside and whispered to Crawshay.

Then he settled again to the witness; quiet now, masterly, and courteous.

"You saw Dick Arden take the despatch," he said, softly, "but it was not from your father that he took it?"

"No."

"From whom"—very gently—"did you see Dick Arden take this despatch?"

She would have spoken. She was trying to speak. But—

"He took it from me, gentlemen," said Falconer.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THERE was no uproar now, but, through all the Court, the dead silence of a triumphant hate.

"The witness may go," said Calthorpe, coolly. "Stay. One question more. Did you see, Mistress Millicent, the paper that Dick Arden received from Falconer?"

"I did."

The words came now mechanically. Struggle was past.

"What superscription had that paper?"

"None."

A movement of satisfaction in the listeners could be felt.

"You are very sure that this paper was not superscribed to me?"

"It was blank."

"You may go, Mistress Millicent Arden." Calthorpe smiled on her kindly now. "And I think," he said, "you have cleared your lover."

She tottered, and caught by the balustrade.

There was a stir of consultation in the Court, from which Calthorpe looked up, and, seeing the girl still stand where she was, he said again, "You may go."

"With your good leave, sir," she said, "I

will stay here, where I may look on the prisoner."

There was a faint sound from Falconer, and a grunt of surprise from Calthorpe.

"A very fury of vengeance," he said to Crawshay, "for all her tender mien."

He turned to Sir Roger, speaking aloud:

"Sir Roger Arden, it is now clear that your despatch did not reach your luckless nephew. It remains to ask you into what hands you entrusted that despatch?"

Sir Roger looked at Falconer, and was silent. He looked at his daughter, and laughed a sudden, fierce laugh.

"You're for truth!" he said. "Here's truth then. I gave my despatch to Ned Falconer."

And he glared at the prisoner.

Calthorpe silenced the noise that rose on these words and addressed his fellows.

"Gentlemen," he said, "you have heard that Sir Roger Arden entrusted to the prisoner Falconer a packet superscribed to me. That Mistress Millicent saw Falconer give Dick Arden, in its place, a substituted packet with a blank cover. That the old clergyman saw Dick break that cover and carry its contents to Cromwell's camp. Where Noll Cromwell finds these contents to be an offer of treason writ at the foot of my despatch. Of my said despatch we know

only that it never reached Sir Roger, but that Joan Arden, Falconer's tool, received it from John Stubbs, refuses to tell us to whom she gave it, and is strengthened in her contempt of this Court by Falconer, the accused."

And Joan Arden heard it all and could not speak.

"You will consider your verdict, gentlemen," said Calthorpe. "Unless you, Captain Falconer, have aught still to urge in your defence?"

"I am innocent," said Falconer.

"You have no more to say?"

"No more."

Calthorpe was turning to the others.

"But I, gentlemen, have more to say."

It was the gentle, piercing voice of Millicent Arden that arrested him, and a movement of surprise ran through the Court.

"If this Court will graciously hear me," she entreated.

"Speak," said Calthorpe, turning in his chair to look at her.

"Gentlemen," she said, and it seemed the fine-strung voice must break, for the weight of pleading that it bore, "you have heard this witness—this wise witness—of time and place: of coming and going: of what man held a paper, and what like of paper it was. You have heard it now, as I heard it before, till the brain turns,

and the heart stands still; and a man's actions are no more than the moves in a crafty game; and all may track him out by a reckoning of chances. But there is more, gentlemen," she said, "there is more than counting of chances goes to the deed of a man. There is the man! And because you do not know this man——"

She came down before the row of judges; she faced them, her hands hanging by her side. —"You will let me speak of him," she implored, "you will let me speak of him—I, who know?"

Calthorpe stared at her curiously.

"Proceed," he said.

Then she lost her self-command.

"But where to begin?" she asked, blindly. "Unskilled as I am—and in such deadly fear. For—I love him, gentlemen," she said, simply.

"Millicent!" It was her father cried out in horror.

He staggered to his feet.

"Father," she said, humbly, "it is true. Your daughter—pledging my troth to Dick Arden; and all the while loving none other but this man."

"Millicent!" whispered the prisoner.

Sir Roger Arden, holding the table, gazing blankly at his daughter, cried: "You are mad Mad!"

"I have been mad, father," she said, with

sad submission. "In a madness of anger against the man I love, I falsely gave my faith to my dear cousin. And this man, that you call traitor, and that loves me——"

"With my life's blood, Millicent," he said.

"This man it was," said Millicent Arden, "who held me in my weak hour from treachery. Yes! And in every such hour the pure purpose of his soul is beside me to help me. I am a poor creature, gentlemen; weak, bewildered by fancies, by terrors, by longings. Terror of death to him—longing for life with him. And it needed but a lie from me to shift off this shame and horror, and to lay it on the helpless dead. But"—her voice lifted—"his strong spirit stood there, over against my weak spirit, and called upon me for a truth to rise up and meet *his* truth. And *will* call to me"—her voice broke at last—"ever—ever"—she sobbed out: "ay! though I hear it in loneliness and in mourning all my days."

"My maid—my little maid!"—her father leaned quickly towards her.

"No! Only *his* now," she said, and running to the prisoner's outstretched arms—"Yours—yours," she cried, and clung to him.

Calthorpe's voice was rough, as he spoke to Sir Roger Arden, fallen back into his chair.

"Look up, old friend," he said. "This shame will be soon wiped out."

Millicent was talking to Ned Falconer, clinging to him.

"Any way you will," she sobbed. "To die with you! Oh! give me leave to die with you!"

"I can't—I can't," said he.

"Ah! then, don't grieve, dear," she said, "I'll live. I'll try to live. Tell me how—tell me! Oh! I'll never cease trying—anything you tell me—my dear—my dear."

Calthorpe struck the table hard.

"Come!" he said, "an end to this shame."

"End? What end?" muttered Sir Roger Arden. "What end?"

"Your verdict, gentlemen," said Calthorpe.

He drew out a paper, on which the name of each judge was written.

"It won't hurt," whispered Millicent. "Not long—not long."

Falconer met her brave, tender smile with a smile.

"It won't make me run this time, please God," he said.

She put her hand on his lips with a sobbing cry.

Sir Roger was muttering still:

". . . Noll Cromwell thought he had ended the matter when he shot—a messenger. . . ."

"Captain Crawshay. Your verdict?" said Calthorpe.

Crawshay rose.

"Guilty," he said, and sat again.

". . . Ned Falconer thought he had ended the matter," said Sir Roger, "when he burnt up —a letter. . . ."

"Yours, Dacre?" said Calthorpe.

"Guilty," said Dacre.

The muttered words ran on:

". . . The devil and I thought 'twas ended, indeed, when you gagged and bound the girl. . . ."

"Thorpe? Bingham?"

Calthorpe called on each in turn. And each in turn said "Guilty."

"But there's no end—no end," said Sir Roger Arden.

"What do you say, Roger?" asked Calthorpe, kindly.

"I say there is no end!" Sir Roger Arden cried out loud and fierce.

Calthorpe sought to soothe the old man.

"Your verdict, Roger," he said. "And then there'll be an end, indeed, and your girl your own again."

"In loneliness and in mourning all her days," murmured Sir Roger Arden.

He sprang to his feet.

"'Tis the lying devil tells of an end!" he cried. "I say there's no end yet!"

The judges exchanged pitying glances.

"Your verdict, Roger," said Calthorpe.

"*Not guilty!*" Sir Roger Arden said.

And amid the uproar that followed his words, two voices only spoke clearly: his daughter's, that sobbed, "God be praised!" and her lover's, that replied with a passionate pity: "For *him*, Millicent. For *him!*"

All the other listeners were calling to each other confusedly: "Folly! Madness! The old man is crazed!"

"Crazed?" said Sir Roger Arden. And no man who had fought under him had ever heard the word of command come more distinct.

"Ask yonder witness," he said, "whom you gagged with a name on her lips half-spoke."

Amazed, all looked towards Joan Arden, whose whole aspect was a wild, new struggle for speech.

"That mad wench? No!" said Calthorpe.

And: "No! No!" cried Falconer, eagerly, "Not Joan!"

"Thou saucy knave!" Calthorpe turned furiously upon the prisoner. "Nay, then. She shall speak! Unbind the witness!"

"Joan Arden," Sir Roger turned and gave his orders to the girl, while the men were loosing

the gag, " tell this Court to whom you carried Calthorpe's letter."

" To you ! " she cried, when freed, " to you ! "

And when incredulous shouts broke in on her words, the young slight thing turned, and dominated the crowd.

" I swear it ! " she cried. " 'Twas Sir Roger Arden had from me the letter with the Wreathed Dagger ! Only he had it ! Only Sir Roger is the traitor ! 'Twas he took Calthorpe's letter from me ! He wrote his own wickedness on it ! And sealed it up, lying and feigning to me all the while, and sent Dick, my brother, with it to his death ! And would have let you die—Ned ! Ned ! " She stretched out her arms wildly. " *Her* father, Ned ! Her father would have let you die in his place."

" He would not," said Falconer, strongly. " He did not ! Look up, Millicent ! " he cried. " He would not—he did not let me die."

" I—can't—can't see," said Millicent Arden.

She swayed. Ned caught her by the arm, and she cried for strength to stand—body and soul.

" I see too well," the blind girl muttered, and slunk back among the crowd.

Sir Giles Calthorpe was on his feet, staring at his old comrade—incredulous still.

"Sir Roger Arden," he asked slowly, "do you avow——"

Sir Roger took up Calthorpe's word, hoarse and strong.

"I avow, Sir Giles Calthorpe, that your letter came to me. And that it went to Cromwell from me, as Joan Arden knew, and as Ned Falconer would not let her say. That a daylight surrender I could not compass, with these mutinous young bloods. And so would have sold Noll the place by night. In policy."

A storm of jeers broke out, echoing him.

"*Policy!*" they cried.

He made his voice heard against all.

"Good policy," he said, and glared at them.

His stubborn pride struck all into a moment's hush of wonder. And, through that hush, one sharp sob came from his child.

He staggered; muttered: "Good policy's bad. Bad. Dick gone. . . . Ned going. . . The little maid. . . ."

He pulled himself erect, and, with his last strength:

"Trial's done, gentlemen!" he said. "Guilty. Guilty. Guilty."

He fell forward on the table, and there lay.

"Is it death?" Calthorpe asked, breathless, of Ursula Tuddenham, who hurried to the fallen man.

"No," she said, shortly, busied with loos-

ing the old man's neck-band. "Some swoon or stroke."

"Better death," said Sir Roger's fellow-in-arms. "But if he lives——" He gave the order, "Guard the traitor."

"As you will," said Ursula Tuddenham, coldly. "But first, give him air."

And Thorpe and Dacre, obeying her, carried Sir Roger Arden and laid him in his own great chair.

The figure of her father, stretched seeming-lifeless, was the first sight that Millicent's dizzy eyes took in. The first sound that pierced her dazed hearing was Calthorpe's word:

"Release Captain Falconer!"

The guard stepped back, and Ned was free.

"Captain Falconer"—Calthorpe was seeking words strong enough to speak the praise of his thoughts—"you are—you are——"

"A broke coward, sir," cried out Ned. "A runaway!" Every passion among the crowd was bowed to silence at the passion in his voice. "A despairing man, whom yet my old captain would not cast off to despair! My old captain—lying yonder! Whose crime hath wrecked himself—his house—his reason!"

He flung himself on his knee.

"Gentlemen! Gentlemen!" he cried.

Sir Giles Calthorpe looked to his fellow-judges. And when he spoke, he spoke not their

word only, but the word of every man that stood by.

"Captain Falconer," he said, "you have earned King Charles's trust: last night, at the inner palisado, and this night, here. We grant you ward of Sir Roger Arden, traitor."

With a mute sign of thankfulness, Falconer stood up.

"Which you will answer to me—" finished Calthorpe.

Falconer saluted.

"—With my life."

"We'll ride at once," said Calthorpe. "The air of this place is thick with shame."

And so it came that Millicent Arden, crying still for strength, still to stand, saw the crowding, gazing ring of faces melt rapidly away.

All the wondering strangers were gone immediately. Now those others were going—once familiar friends.

That man with the tight-shut mouth—that went by the great chair without a look—was Arthur Mainwaring. Her father would chide Arthur Mainwaring often for too much laughing.

Nearly all gone now. Those few that lingered by the chair were Dr. Bertram and Stocker, and poor Bridget, all purple and heaving with sobs, and, of course, Aunt Ursula.

Old Stocker kissed the hand that hung helpless. That was very kind of him.

But the hand moved, which made Millicent draw back quickly out of sight, and made Aunt Ursula motion the other three to go away.

And then her father sat straight up in his chair.

And Aunt Ursula, with dropped lids and clasped hands, went from the room without a word.

"Here's a pother," said Sir Roger, "for a blow over the head in fair fight!" His voice was weak, but cheery. "I'll take a hundred such—for the King!"

Then something failed him, or returned to him.

He sank back.

"Trial's over," he murmured thickly. "Verdict. Sentence. . . ."

His eyes wandered wistfully, searchingly.

"All gone? All?" he asked.

"I'm here, sir," said Ned Falconer.

He was kneeling by the old man's chair, and clasping the feeble hand.

But Sir Roger's gaze went past him.

"None else?" he asked.

Ned Falconer did not look at the girl who stood stupidly behind the chair. He clasped the weak hand tighter.

She did not know what to do. She must do something. She came slowly.

Her father heard her step. But neither did he look round at her. He stiffened himself in his chair, and stared hard at the man who held his hand.

When she came round from behind the chair, she saw her dear father's face. And then she put her arms round his neck, and laid his head upon her shoulder; and cried, and said:

"Poor father! Poor father!"

It was the only thing that she could do.

THE END

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Daphne

or

"MARRIAGE À LA MODE"

By Mrs. HUMPHRY WARD

With Four Illustrations in Colours, and Six Pen Drawings by FRED PEGRAM. 6*s*.

THE recent visit of Mrs. Humphry Ward to the United States has resulted in a book that promises to be the outstanding success of the season. Mrs. Ward has turned her trained intellect upon the state of the Divorce Law, which many good critics have denounced as a disgrace to civilisation. In her treatment of this vital human problem Mrs. Ward is truthful and direct. With delicate, unerring touch she describes American society as it exists, with its present laxity of regard for the marriage bond.

"Daphne or 'Marriage à la Mode'" is the story of an international marriage—of a young Englishman's love for a bright American girl of wealth, and the failure of their married life through misunderstanding and jealousy. With all her crying faults Daphne Floyd, the heroine, is an interesting character—one of the best delineations of a peculiar type in recent fiction—and human in every word and action.

The remaining characters are Roger Barnes, the husband; Captain Boyson, the American naval officer, whose denunciation of the laxities and enormities with regard to marriage allowed in various States of the Union reflects the opinion of New England; the tragic Mrs. Verrier; the mischievous Chloe Fairmile, and others. The whole story leads up to the scene in the last chapter between the divorced husband and wife, and by it Mrs. Ward is content that her book should be judged.

NEW FICTION

The Yellow God

An Idol of Africa

By H. RIDER HAGGARD

Author of "The Ghost Kings," etc.

With Frontispiece in Colours, and Two Half-tone Plates by A. MICHAEL. 6*s*.

IT is doubtful whether in any of his romances Mr. Rider Haggard has revealed a country more weird, more mysterious, than Asikiland—the home of "The Yellow God." Situated in the heart of "Darkest Africa" it is only re-discovered, through many perils and hardships, by the hero of the story. How he heard of this land of gold, and why he decided to seek it, form a pleasant prelude to the adventures themselves.

As regards Asika herself, the presiding genius of this strange land, she ranks with Ayesha and those other royal women of Mr. Haggard's imagination, who allure by their peerless beauty and repel by their inhuman cruelty.

The Show Girl

By MAX PEMBERTON

Author of "Sir Richard Escombe," etc.

With Frontispiece in Colours by CYRUS CUNEO, R.I. 6*s*.

IT is to Paris that Mr. Pemberton takes us in this story—the Paris of Montmartre, of the Quartier Latin—in the company of Henry Gastonard, a rollicking art student. The story fascinates at the outset, when we are privileged to read a letter from Gastonard to his friend Paddy O'Connell, in which the introduction to Mimi, the "Show Girl," is given.

Mr. Pemberton's story revolves around the doings of the adorable "Mimi the Simpleton," whose charms cannot fail to appeal to the reader. She is a heroine who will rank with the best of Mr. Pemberton's creations, this little waif of the Circus who inspired love in the hearts of all men with whom she came in contact. How this same charm preserved her, through all the horrors of her early life, is not the least interesting feature of the story.

Pathos, humour, wild fun and serious adventure; love, passion, comedy and tragedy, make "The Show Girl" one of the best Pemberton books yet produced.

NEW FICTION

The Sword of the Lord

By JOSEPH HOCKING

Author of "A Strong Man's Vow," "A Flame of Fire," etc.

With Frontispiece in Colours by MAX COWPER. 3*s.* 6*d.*

"THE SWORD OF THE LORD" is a stirring story of Luther and his times, written with the author's well-known power.

Brian Hamilton is sent to Germany by Henry VIII. to bring a lady of noble birth to England, where her presence is required for political reasons. The King has chosen Hamilton for the task partly because the latter is reputed to be a woman-hater, and Henry does not desire a messenger likely to fall in love with the lady. But even so absolute a monarch as Henry VIII. is not always able to stay the tide of love.

Brian's mission is surrounded by almost overwhelming difficulties, for, at the time of his arrival, Germany is in a state of ferment owing to the growth of the Reformation. He meets Luther and Erasmus, and has many thrilling experiences in the execution of his important mission.

The Interrupted Kiss

By RICHARD MARSH

Author of "The Seen and the Unseen," "The Girl and the Miracle," etc.

With Frontispiece in Colours by REX OSBORNE. 6*s.*

THE tragedy begins in the opening chapters. A murder is committed in circumstances which readily throw suspicion upon several persons. How the incubus of this suspicion affects them, and especially how it affects the two whose blissful kiss was interrupted on the eve of the eventful night, is told in Mr. Marsh's most effective manner.

Elsie Grahame, the heroine, has reason to place herself under suspicion of being the murderer of her uncle, and her conduct in various trying situations provides some of the most delightful reading in the story. Her interview with the blackmailer and her subsequent offer of herself as security for the money raised to meet his demands are convincingly described. But the story teems with interest throughout; there is humour in plenty, dialogue of brilliant quality, and a continuous succession of incident that does not permit a moment of faltering interest.

NEW FICTION

The Red Saint

By WARWICK DEEPING

Author of "Mad Barbara," "Uther and Igraine," etc.

With Frontispiece in Colours by CHRISTOPHER CLARK, R.I. 6*s*.

THIS is the romance of a saint who found the world too rough for her, and whose adventures brought her into strange company upon the road.

In the building of England, under men such as De Montfort and those who preceded and followed him, there were wars and rumours of wars, and many suffered at the hands of kings. England was a rich treasure house for adventurers from over the sea to plunder. The tragic life of Denise began at the hands of one of these hired captains. The book tells of her life in the woods ; how she was loved by one man and wounded by another ; how the Benedictines would have made her a wonder-worker, but how her sister women drove her out into the snow ; and how Aymery, gentleman of Sussex, won that which he had thought lost.

"The Red Saint" is the most brilliant novel written by Mr. Warwick Deeping since "Uther and Igraine."

Sir Gregory's Silence

By A. W. MARCHMONT

Author of "My Lost Self," "The Man who was Dead," etc.

With Frontispiece in Colours by N. TENISON. 6*s*.

SIR GREGORY'S friends and relations know that in his early days he lived in America ; but they know nothing of his life there, for on that subject he rigidly maintains silence. And this brings trouble not only to himself, but also to others.

Bulmer, Sir Gregory's son, falls in love with a typist, and, for some unknown reason, a rich American lady schemes to prevent their marriage. She is aided by a man who poses as a United States Senator, and who, having some knowledge of Sir Gregory's secret, blackmails him.

All attempts to describe Mr. Marchmont's ingenious dramatic tale must be inadequate, and it can only be said that this story of love and intrigue will not let the reader rest until the startling climax is reached.

NEW FICTION

The Conquest of Chrystabel

By Mrs. GEORGE DE HORNE VAIZEY

Author of "Flaming June," etc.

With Frontispiece in Colours by F. HODGE. 6*s*.

"THE way of a man with a maid," and the perversity of the maid herself, is an old theme, but one that never palls. "The Conquest of Chrystabel" deals with this "old, old story," but in such a manner that it is once more new, fresh and invigorating. In her quiet Lakeland home Chrystabel Victor, with her winsomeness and naïve appreciation of her own charms, is a conqueror of hearts. How she went forth into the world and was herself conquered is the story which Mrs. de Horne Vaizey tells with delightful charm and vivacity. Readers of "Flaming June" will welcome it heartily, and, indeed, "The Conquest of Chrystabel" is a book which is bound to achieve success, for its appeal is to all who have loved, all who love, and all who—like Chrystabel herself—hope to love.

Peggy the Daughter

By KATHARINE TYNAN

Author of "Mary Gray," etc.

With Frontispiece in Colours by WARWICK GOBLE. 6*s*.

WHILE Peggy is a little child, her father, Sir Pierce Rowan, abducts Priscilla Penn, a rich Quakeress. They are pursued, and, to avoid capture, Sir Pierce shoots one of the pursuers; and, later, he marries Priscilla, who, in secret, has long loved him. But he is arrested, tried and sentenced to penal servitude. The new Lady Rowan takes Peggy under her care, and the latter grows up a charming and lovable girl. Not until she is seventeen does Priscilla tell her of her father, and that he must remain in prison twelve more years unless something can be done to obtain pardon for him.

What Peggy does to attain this end, and what success she achieves, Miss Tynan tells in the inimitable manner which has caused her to be regarded as one of the best story-tellers of the present day. "Peggy the Daughter" might be described as a picturesque Irish idyll, but it is also a story instinct with the motives and purposes of human life and character.

NEW FICTION

The Circular Staircase

By MARY ROBERTS RINEHART

With Frontispiece in Colours, and 5 Half-Tone Plates by LESTER RALPH. 6*s*.

OF the detective stories which have appeared in recent years "The Circular Staircase" is one of the best, and its author has rapidly taken her place as a worthy exponent of the art of Gaboriau and Anna Katharine Green. "The Circular Staircase" attained such vogue on its recent publication in America that it soon became one of the six best-selling novels of the season—a result which may be accounted for partly by the fact that the tension of the story is relieved by frequent flashes of humour, ordinarily absent from books of this kind.

The illustrations by Lester Ralph, who has rapidly taken his place among the best draughtsmen of the day, are not the least attractive feature of this excellent book.

A Royal Ward

By PERCY J. BREBNER

Author of "Princess Maritza," "Vayenne," etc.

With Frontispiece in Colours by CHRISTOPHER CLARK, R.I. 6*s*.

THE romantic adventures of Lady Betty Walmisley take place in England when Europe is in the throes of the Napoleonic wars. Although secure in England, Lady Betty's life is, indirectly, moulded by the great upheaval on the Continent. But for the French Revolution and the wars that followed, she would never have met her two suitors, Lieutenant Evertsen and Claud Dalbert, would never have been suspected of treason, and would never have gained the happiness that is hers at last.

Mr. Brebner's historical romances are dramatic and enthralling, and with every new story his ability to create the correct atmosphere becomes more pronounced. He never fails to translate his readers to the period of his tale, and in "A Royal Ward" we get a striking vision of certain phases of life in England during the Regency.

"A Royal Ward" gains further interest from the circumstance that Mr. Brebner has founded it upon fact.

NEW FICTION

The Lure of Eve

By EDITH MARY MOORE

With Frontispiece in Colours by J. E. SUTCLIFFE. 6*s*.

To those who are interested in "some new thing" this book should appeal with special force. It is the writer's first published novel, and may be said at once to possess great power.

The characters are drawn with a sureness of touch that proves the author to be a closely observant student of her fellow-beings, and the study of Annabel Laine, a woman possessed of beauty and no soul, is perhaps one of the most daring and successful analyses of the undesirable feminine in recent literature.

How she exercised her lure of beauty, and the results that accrued, form the gist of the story. It is indeed a love story —an old theme, but in "The Lure of Eve" presented in a manner that is entirely new.

Those who like to read in novels of the doings of writers and artists will find a special interest in "The Lure of Eve."

The Love-Brokers

By ALBERT KINROSS

Author of "The Land of Every Man," etc.

With Frontispiece in Colours by P. B. HICKLING. 6*s*.

THE subject of "The Love-Brokers" is our marriage laws and our marriage lawyers—especially the latter. Hence the title of the book.

To the ordinary newspaper reader a divorce case is an amusing or scandalous item served up between the latest market reports and a batch of foreign telegrams; according to the author it is, in reality, legalised robbery, blackmail and extortion, practised and upheld by lawyers for their own profit.

In the course of his engrossing story Mr. Kinross describes a divorce case as it actually is, and demonstrates that the parties really "guilty" are the State-aided parasites who are empowered by the law to demand "proofs of guilt" and a considerable sum of money in return for the decree which spells release.

NEW FICTION

Double Bonds

By FLORINDA McCALL

With Frontispiece in Colours by H. L. BACON. 6*s*.

SILVER MACKAY, a pathetic but winsome maiden of the Australian Bush, marries Jack Breslin, and at the early age of sixteen is left a widow. An aunt, hitherto unknown to Silver, seeks her and, struck by her extraordinary beauty, determines to educate her niece and arrange a brilliant marriage for her. When the haughty Australian millionaire, Marcus Ducaine, sees Silver, he falls in love with her, proposes, and is accepted. The ambitious aunt, however, extracts from her young *protégée* a promise which is fraught with trouble and grief for the guileless bride-elect. Ducaine, however, learns his wife's secret of her former marriage. How does he take it? Whatever the answer to this question is, readers of this story may safely be promised keen, healthy enjoyment.

A Daughter of the Storm

By CAPT. FRANK H. SHAW

With Frontispiece in Colours. 6*s*.

CAPTAIN SHAW has rapidly won popular favour as a writer of stirring tales of the sea, for he writes with the knowledge gained by personal experience. Like Captain Marryat and Clark Russell, he is a sailor, and "A Daughter of the Storm" is a story of the sea and of those who use the sea. It is a tale of the unbridled passions of men—of love and hate, of heroism and cowardice.

But it deals more closely with the manners and thoughts of one who owed all things to the sea: who gave all to it—her love and her highest courage. It tells, too, of one great hour in her life when, the world going out in storm and darkness, with the edifice of her existence tottering about her ears, she yet rose supreme in the time of her deadliest danger and wrenched victory from the jaws of defeat.

Incidentally "A Daughter of the Storm" teaches a lesson to those who would have it that aliens can serve our flag as loyally as men of British blood.

NEW FICTION

Polly of the Circus

By MARGARET MAYO

With Eight Illustrations by HARRY M. BUNKER. 3*s.* 6*d.*

POLLY is one of the most charming of recent creations in fiction. Born and bred in the circus, knowing no other environment save the sawdust ring, and ever subject to those defiling influences of which an itinerant life is full, she remains sweet and pure.

Accident throws her into the home of a young clergyman, who protects her from the bitter tongue of gossip, slowly draws her away from her old life in the tent, and finally falls in love with her. How the pretty and dainty heroine eventually drifts back into her old life, only to return at last to the arms of the man who shielded her at great sacrifice to himself, may well be left for the reader's enjoyment. The story is one of laughter and tears, and must attract all save the most hardened of pessimists.

Not since Babbie, of "The Little Minister," has there been a heroine who makes such a compelling appeal.

The Secret Paper

By WALTER WOOD

Author of "The Revenge of Gilbert Strange," etc.

With Frontispiece in Colours by N. TENISON. 6*s.*

"THE SECRET PAPER" is essentially a novel of plot and action, with the double advantage of possessing a scene laid partly in England and partly in America. Mr. Walter Wood finished revising the story immediately after his last visit to the United States and Canada, so that the impressions recorded were all the fresher and stronger. It is Mr. Wood's habit in travelling to get off the beaten track of tourists, and in this new novel he has made use of unfamiliar experiences in such places as The Bowery and Chinatown, in New York, and the more or less unfrequented cities on the Mississippi and in the Middle West. The novel contains a strong love interest and a most resourceful and alluring heroine.

RECENT FICTION

The Ghost Kings

By H. RIDER HAGGARD

Author of "Benita," "King Solomon's Mines," etc.

With 8 *Illustrations by* A. MICHAEL. 6*s*.

ONCE more we have the presentation of a girl of wonderful charm, who through no desire of her own is endowed with mystical properties by the superstitious natives. Mr. Rider Haggard doubtless knows more of the Zulus than any other writer of our day, and he introduces here a picture of that nation under Dingaan which is both vivid and convincing. Their dealings with the heroine, her lover, and the renegade European who lives with them, form some of the chief incidents of the book, but it is the love story of the mysterious maiden, of her wanderings in the land of the Ghost Kings—surely one of the weirdest regions Mr. Haggard has ever imagined—of the search of her lover for her, and of their reunion after many strange adventures, which make up a romance of exciting and fascinating interest.

"One of the most fascinating romances this author has ever written. A brilliant and vehement novel, abundantly worthy to be placed side by side with 'She' and 'King Solomon's Mines.'"—*Standard.*

The Virgin in Judgment

By EDEN PHILLPOTTS

Author of "The Mother," etc.

With Frontispiece in Colours by GUNNING KING. 6*s*.

ONCE again Mr. Eden Phillpotts has woven a fascinating romance with "Dartymoor" as the base of the fabric, but the design and substance are new, vigorous, and altogether pleasing. The general characters of the story will rank among Mr. Phillpott's finest creations, but Rhoda—who gives the title to the book—will doubtless live as his greatest. This strange child of the moor, with her curious, weird temperament, forms one of the most subtle studies in femininity in modern literature.

"No one who likes humour, humanity, good psychology, beautifully felt landscape, and an interesting plot can fail to like 'The Virgin in Judgment.'" —*Evening Standard.*

RECENT FICTION

Sir Richard Escombe

By MAX PEMBERTON

Author of "Wheels of Anarchy," etc.

With Frontispiece in Colours by CYRUS CUNEO, R.I. 6*s.*

MR. MAX PEMBERTON has selected as the principal theme of his new story the notorious Society of St. Francis in the reign of George II. and its strange doings at Medmenham Abbey. The main interest, however, centres round Sir Richard Escombe and his charming Kitty Dulcimore, and in the recital of their love story the author has provided one of the best romances associated with his name.

"A spirited romance, very brightly written. . . . Never has Mr. Pemberton written better than in 'Sir Richard Escombe.' . . . Many of the scenes reach a really high level of achievement."—*Daily Mail.*

Miss Fallowfield's Fortune

By ELLEN THORNEYCROFT FOWLER

(The Hon. Mrs. ALFRED FELKIN).

With 4 *Illustrations by* STEVEN SPURRIER. 6*s.*

MISS FALLOWFIELD, while deploring her poverty, is left a million pounds. She is afterwards married to the Rev. Luke Forrester, who has a son named Claude by a former marriage. The bride and bridegroom depart to Australia on a honeymoon tour; news comes home that the ship has been wrecked and both of them drowned. The question of the disposal of the fortune arises. If Mrs. Forrester died before her husband the money will have passed to the latter, and from him to Claude; but if Mr. Forrester was first deceased the fortune belongs to the bride's niece, Dagmar, beloved by Claude. How the difficulties which obscure the question as to who is legally entitled to the money are overcome must be left to the reader to discover.

"To take up a fresh story of Ellen Thorneycroft Fowler's is to anticipate a few hours of thorough entertainment among very real characters, and this does not disappoint us of our anticipation. . . . The doings and sayings of the various groups of people are chronicled with such cleverness, humour, and insight that the book will be found absorbing from first to last."—*Daily Telegraph.*

RECENT FICTION

The Golden Precipice

By H. B. MARRIOTT WATSON

Author of "Galloping Dick," "The Privateers," etc.

With Frontispiece in Colours by W. HERBERT HOLLOWAY. 6*s*.

MR. MARRIOTT WATSON has, in this novel of treasure-seeking, crowded sensational scenes one upon another. Directly the steamer sets off upon her journey stirring episodes happen on board. Then follows an attempt to maroon the captain and others, which is frustrated by the engineer, a mighty man of muscle. A mutiny breaks out, and the reader is hurried from one scene of fighting to another. Plots and counterplots are formed by the two parties to gain the treasure cavern, which is found to be bare. After some exciting adventures with his lady-love, the engineer obtains a fresh clue, the treasure is found, the mutineers are defeated, and the steamer starts for home.

"The writer's gusto is evident in every page in this stirring revival of the antique, venerable, venerated legend about the Caribbean pirates' treasure. . . . We can promise all who read this story a right jovial, thrilling, sparkling entertainment for their money and their trouble."—*Daily Graphic.*

Mad Barbara

By WARWICK DEEPING

Author of "Uther and Igraine," "The Slanderers," etc.

With Frontispiece in Colours by CHRISTOPHER CLARK, R.I. 6*s*.

THE author of "Uther and Igraine" has followed up his brilliant success with a first-rate piece of work, which is certain to win the admiration of the critics and the reading public. The dialogue in "Mad Barbara," and the dramatic scenes which the story contains, exhibit all Mr. Warwick Deeping's accustomed felicity of phrasing. The plot, which he develops with great skill, is laid in the Stuart period, and is one of absorbing interest.

"The narrative generally is as full of unexpected beauties as the windings of a mountain stream—the happy phrase, the piquant reflection, are continually surprising the reader. . . . It is a tale to be read once for itself and again for the manner of its telling."—*Liverpool Courier.*

RECENT FICTION

Rose-White Youth

By DOLF WYLLARDE

Author of "Mafoota," etc.

With Frontispiece in Colours by P. B. HICKLING. 6*s*.

A STUDY of girlhood verging into womanhood is here presented in a manner which arrests attention at the first line and fascinates to the last. Betty, the schoolgirl, with her slang, her grit, her honesty of purpose, but withal, her puzzling femininity, is a character who will secure admiration from all readers. A girl's heart—who can understand it? But Dolf Wyllarde has at least given us an insight into one in this story; has sympathetically revealed the passing of the girl into the woman's realm, with its infinitude of pathos and tragedy.

"We come into a realm of almost inexpressible tenderness when we deal with Dolf Wyllarde's 'Rose-White Youth.' . . . The homeliness of the story is its charm, and it presents to us a heart-touching situation with the art of unaffected simplicity."—*Liverpool Daily Post and Mercury*.

The Hate of Man

By HEADON HILL

Author of "The Duke Decides," etc.

With Frontispiece in Colours by CYRUS CUNEO, R.I. 6*s*.

SIR CHARLES KILLERBY, the proprietor of a great London daily newspaper, has been trying for many years to bring Simon Marwood to justice. The latter takes an oath to avenge himself on Sir Charles, who is the organiser of a strong defence against a great movement of foreigners, plotting Great Britain's overthrow, in which the ex-convict is involved, together with Lester Cornwallis, who is a clerk at the War Office. How Augusta Killerby, Dolly Bede and Adolphe Jebault play their parts in the ensuing events is told by Mr. Headon Hill with characteristic skill.

"Mr. Headon Hill has spread himself finely in his new story, and gives us a piece of sensation which would be hard to beat. . . . Mr. Headon Hill has certainly devoted a great deal of ingenuity to the making of the book, and has been most lavish with his imagination."—*Daily Telegraph*.

RECENT FICTION

A Life's Arrears

By FLORENCE WARDEN

Author of "The House on the Marsh," "The Heiress of Densley Wold," etc.

With Frontispiece in Colours by W. DEWAR. 6*s.*

FROM penury and a hard, humdrum, friendless existence Jane Maristow is suddenly left a fortune of about £2,000 a year. At first Miss Maristow hardly knew what to do with her wealth nor how to enjoy herself with it. After much deliberation she goes to Monte Carlo, where she gets involved in some most exciting adventures, which make excellent reading.

"'A Life's Arrears' opens with pleasant anticipations of ease and wealth for a woman who has always been desperately poor. Her experiences and her love story are told by Miss Florence Warden with all her usual skill and power of holding attention."—*Morning Leader.*

My Lost Self

By A. W. MARCHMONT

Author of "The Man who was Dead," etc.

With Frontispiece in Colours by CYRUS CUNEO, R.I. 6*s.*

MR. MARCHMONT'S new book tells of a young American who finds himself a prisoner among brigands on an island off the coast of Italy. How he is thought a murderer by a beautiful and terror-stricken woman, and how the brigands themselves mistake him for one of their leaders, are two of many incidents which will grip all lovers of mystery, adventure, and passion.

"Mr. Marchmont is a master craftsman, and lacks neither force nor energy, and he has sent forth in 'My Lost Self' one of the best of his melodramatic romances."—*The Scotsman.*

The Cairn of the Badger

By MADGE BARLOW

With Frontispiece in Colours by J. E. SUTCLIFFE. 6*s.*

"THE CAIRN OF THE BADGER" is the story of a dramatic conflict between two men representing birth and poverty on the one hand, and plebeian blood and wealth on the other. Feminine intrigue holds the issue of the struggle in thrilling suspense, until a powerful and moving climax is reached.

"Miss Barlow manipulates the elemental passions with an adept hand, and the creation is a story of arresting power and emotional force."—*Sheffield Independent.*

RECENT FICTION

The Amethyst Cross

By FERGUS HUME

Author of "The Mystery of a Hansom Cab," etc.

With Frontispiece in Colours by DUDLEY TENNANT. 3*s.* 6*d.*

"THE AMETHYST CROSS" is a novel full of thrilling situations and startling surprises. The plot is woven round an amethyst cross, in connection with which a fortune is concerned.

"Ingenious and skilfully complex in its plot, abounding in strong situations, full of human interest, and told with much literary ability." —*The Scotsman.*

Life's Chequer-Board

By HELEN WALLACE

Author of "The Coming of Isobel," "To Pleasure Madame," etc.

With 4 Illustrations by HOWARD SOMERVILLE. 6*s.*

THE reader will find in this new book an abundance of incident and delightful descriptive touches which will recall the glow of the heather and the freshness of the hill breezes. It is a stirring story of self-sacrifice and unconscious love.

"The characters are well drawn, and the plot is strongly executed. Her descriptive touches are admirable. It is a splendid story of self-sacrifice and concealed love."—*Perthshire Courier.*

The Revenge of Gilbert Strange

By WALTER WOOD

Author of "The Lord of the Dyke," etc.

With Frontispiece in Colours by MAX COWPER. 6*s.*

CONFIDENT of the stability of the business inherited from his father, Gilbert Strange led a comfortable, easy-going life until the day when the great crash came. Financial ruin—followed by social ostracism, and his dismissal by his *fiancée*—revealed to him his real strength, and created the desire to avenge himself upon those who had triumphed in his downfall.

"The author deserves hearty congratulation on the result of his labours, which have added another good story to his previous productions."—*Western Daily Press.*

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